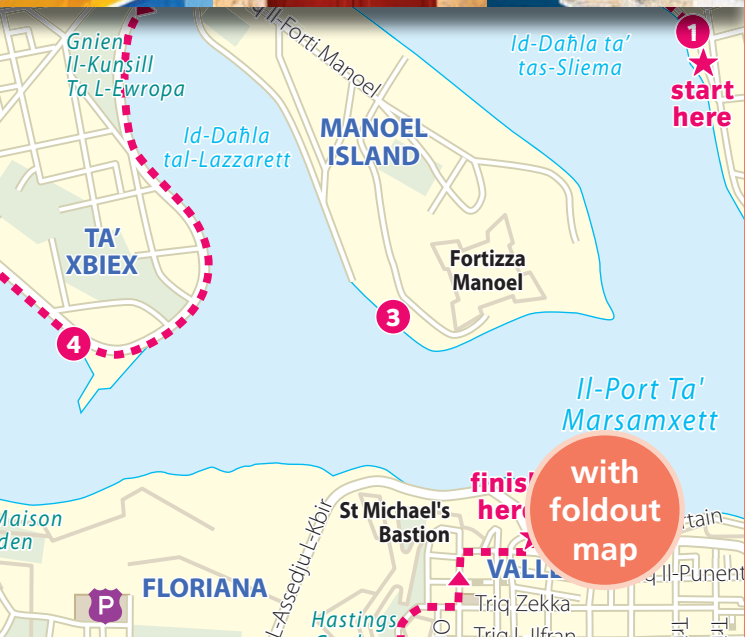
Frommer's™

# Malta & Gozo day BY day™

## 23 Smart Ways to See the Region



VISIT…

MALTA & GOZO
COMINO
Il-Fliegu Ta' Malta
Il-Ponta ta'l-Aħrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Ċirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
MARFA
Mellieħa Bay
Selmun Bay
Salina Bay
Ponta tal-Qrejten
Qawra
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Mellieħa
Xemxija
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieħ
Anchor Bay
St Paul's Bay
Bur Marrad
Għargħur
St Julian's
Swieqi
Sliema
Il-Port ta' Marsamxett
Manikata
Ras il-Waħx
Gżira
VALLETTA
Ras il-Ġebel
Naxxar
Ta' Xbiex
Kalkara
Golden Bay
Mġarr
Żebbieġ
Mosta
Birkirkara
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Ġnejna Bay
Santa Venera
Hamrun
Żabbar
Marsaskala Bay
MALTA
Fgura
Marsaskala
Fomm ir-Riħ Bay
Paola
Mtarfa
Qormi
Tarxien
St Thomas' Bay
Mdina
Baħrija
Żebbuġ
Żejtun
Rabat
Luqa
Xrobb il-Għagin
Baħar Mediterran
Baħar Mediterran
Baħar Mediterran
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Għaxaq
Marsaxlokk
Ġudja
Migra Ferha
Siġġiewi
Mqabba
Kirkop
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Marsaxlokk Bay
Dingli
Ta' Ġħieħ
Birżebbuġa
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Qrendi
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta' Bengħajsa
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
Għar Lapsi
Il-Minkba
Għar Hasan
Il-Mara
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
0 1 mi
0 1 km
GOZO
Il-Ponta ta' Forna
Marsalforn
Ir-Ramla
San Blas Bay
Dahlet Qorrot
Żebbuġ
Għammar
Għasri
Xagħra
Għarb
Qala
San Lawrenz
VICTORIA (Rabat)
Nadur
Għanjsielem
Kerċem
Xewkija
Mġarr
Mġarr Harbour
COMINOTTO
Munxar
Il-Ponta tal-Wardija
Xlendi
Sannat
Xlendi Bay
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay

Frommer's™

# Malta & Gozo day BY day™

1st Edition

by Lesley Anne Rose

WILEY
A John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, Publication

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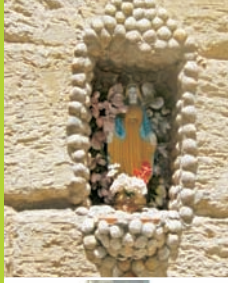

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Telephone (+44) 1243 779777
Email (for orders and customer service enquiries): cs-books@wiley.co.uk. Visit our Home Page on www.wiley.com

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UK Publisher: Sally Smith
Executive Project Editor: Daniel Mersey
Commissioning Editor: Mark Henshall
Development Editor: Mark Henshall
Content Editor: Erica Peters
Cartography: John Tulip
Photo Research: Jill Emeny

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-470-71553-6

Typeset by Wiley Indianapolis Composition Services

Printed and bound in China by RR Donnelley

5 4 3 2 1

## A Note from the Editorial Director

Organizing your time. That's what this guide is all about.

Other guides give you long lists of things to see and do and then expect you to fit the pieces together. The Day by Day guides are different. These guides tell you the best of everything, and then they show you how to see it *in the smartest, most time-efficient way*. Our authors have designed detailed itineraries organized by time, neighborhood, or special interest. And each tour comes with a bulleted map that takes you from stop to stop.

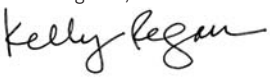
Hoping to feast your eyes on Caravaggio's masterpiece *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist*, explore Malta's subterranean Hypogeum complex or kick back on Gozo's sheltered sands? Whatever your interest or schedule, the Day by Days give you the smartest routes to follow. Not only do we take you to the top attractions, hotels, and restaurants, but we also help you access those special moments that locals get to experience—those 'finds' that turn tourists into travelers.

The Day by Days are also your top choice if you're looking for one complete guide for all your travel needs. The best hotels and restaurants for every budget, the greatest shopping values, the wildest nightlife—it's all here.

Why should you trust our judgment? Because our authors personally visit each place they write about. They're an independent lot who say what they think and would never include places they wouldn't recommend to their best friends. They're also open to suggestions from readers. If you'd like to contact them, please send your comments our way at feedback@frommers.com, and we'll pass them on.

Enjoy your Day by Day guide—the most helpful travel companion you can buy. And have the trip of a lifetime.

Warm regards,



Kelly Regan, Editorial Director
Frommer's Travel Guides

## About the Author

**Lesley Anne Rose** is a freelance writer specialising in travel and scriptwriting. She has developed a substantial portfolio of travel writing over the past decade, including writing a travel column, guidebooks, articles and promotional materials, and her specialist areas include the Southern Caribbean, North America, Malta and the UK. Lesley Anne has made short documentary films and, as a commissioned playwright, has seen her work produced in regional theatre. She also teaches travel writing and film studies.

## Dedication

To Martin Chester—'the historian'.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my husband Martin Chester for taking time off to travel with me, helping with research, formatting, map reading, editing and unending support. Joseph Montebello for encouraging me to get on my bike in Malta. And, for house and cat sitting beyond the call of friendship, thanks to Guy Christiansen and Hilli McManus.

## An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings.

## Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system.** Hotels, restaurants, attractions, shopping, and nightlife are rated on a scale of zero stars (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). In addition to the star-rating system, we also use a kids **icon** to point out the best bets for families. Within each tour, we recommend cafes, bars, or restaurants where you can take a break. Each of these stops appears in a shaded box marked with a coffee-cup-shaped bullet .

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AE | American Express | DISC | Discover | V | Visa |
| DC | Diners Club | MC | MasterCard | | |

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## A Note on Prices

In the 'Take a Break' and 'Best Bets' sections of this book, we have used a system of dollar signs to show a range of costs for 1 night in a hotel (the price of a double-occupancy room) or the cost of an entree (main meal) at a restaurant. Use the following table to decipher the dollar signs:

| Cost | Hotels | Restaurants |
|---|---|---|
| $ | under $100 | under $10 |
| $$ | $100–$200 | $10–$20 |
| $$$ | $200–$300 | $20–$30 |
| $$$$ | $300–$400 | $30–$40 |
| $$$$$ | over $400 | over $40 |

## An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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# 20 Favourite **Moments**

# 20 Favourite Moments

**The Maltese Islands bask in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea** and their 200km of craggy coastline contain fine beaches, an abundance of opportunities to take to the water and some glorious coastal walks. This coastline has witnessed 7,000 years of often dramatic history and inland you'll discover outstanding sights that include megalithic temples, Baroque cities and palaces built by the Knights of St John. A tiny archipelago, this devoutly Catholic nation has for centuries constructed incredible cathedrals and churches, many located at the centre of village life. In addition, no visit to Malta is ever complete without spending time sampling the country's cheeses, meats and breads, or mulling over a glass or two of local wine. Here are 20 of my own favourite experiences on the Maltese Islands.

**1 Feasting your eyes on Caravaggio's Beheading of St John the Baptist.** Caravaggio's breathtaking masterpiece might be the most hyped sight in Malta, but it more than lives up to expectations. Finished in 1608, the painting hangs in Valletta's St John's Co-Cathedral and is considered by many to be the artist's finest work. It's also the only painting Caravaggio ever signed—poignantly within the Baptist's blood. *See p 40.*

**2 Going underground to tour the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.** Without doubt the finest of Malta's World Heritage sites, the Hypogeum is a huge subterranean complex carved into several underground levels around 2500 BC. A guided tour through this unique site will leave you with more questions than answers on who created it and why. *See p 28.*

**3 Getting lost in the lanes of Vittoriosa's Il-Collachio district.** This historic maze of narrow streets was the original home of the Knights of St John when they arrived on Malta in 1530. Il-Collachio is characterised by overhanging balconies, lines of plant pots and steep steps, and I encourage you to forget the time and simply wander aimlessly through this area, one of the most romantic places on the island. *See p 132.*

**4 Savouring the views of Valletta at sunset from Sliema's waterfront.** Sliema's wide waterfront is a popular spot for locals to take a *passeggiata* (an evening stroll) and watch Valletta's limestone buildings turn their famous honey colour in the light of the setting sun. *See p 15.*

**5 Snorkelling in Comino's Blue Lagoon.** Follow in the footsteps of Brad Pitt and take a dip in Comino's sparkling Blue Lagoon, which served as a backdrop for some of his scenes in the 2004 blockbuster film *Troy*. *See p 65.*

*Vittoriosa's Il-Collachio district.*

*Mdina's main gate.*

**6 Standing in the middle of Ħagar Qim & Mnajdra temples.** Ħagar Qim and Mnajdra are the best preserved of Malta's above-ground megalithic temples. Find a quiet spot amid their evocative ruins to imagine this wild windswept spot 5,000 years ago when these temples were in use. ***See p 29.***

**7 Entering Mdina through its Baroque Main Gate.** Visitors have entered the ancient fortified city of Mdina for centuries through its grand Main Gate. Look out for the outline of a much older gate etched into the city wall to the right of its 18th century replacement, which you'll walk through today. ***See p 137.***

**8 Kicking back on the sands of Gozo's Ramla Bay.** Lined with rich red, gold sands, Ramla Bay on Gozo's north coast is the island's best beach. Its wide, sheltered sands are great for families and the shallow sea—warm June–October—is one of my favourite spots for a dip in the water. ***See p 64.***

**9 Discovering Għarb.** Just one of Gozo's picture perfect old villages, Għarb's wide village square is overlooked by an unusual Baroque parish church and is home to a fascinating Folklore Museum where you can peel back the skin of the rural way of life for which this sleepy village is famous. ***See p 111.***

**10 Hopping aboard one of Malta's grand old buses.** Everyone loves Malta's wonderful old yellow buses—most of which are classic British models, from companies such as Leyland, Ford and Bedford, dating back to the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Fares are low and a large fleet of buses work a vast network of routes that serve every inch of the island, so there's no excuse for not taking at least one, often boneshaking, trip. ***See p 161.***

*Ramla Bay, Gozo.*

*Azure Window, Dwejra Bay, Gozo.*

**11 Tucking into a slice of Gozo cheese washed down with a glass of local wine.** Gozo is the home of good food and fine wine and there's a long tradition of cheese-making on the island, often using sheep's milk. Gozo cheese can be picked up in many local stores and is a staple food on numerous restaurant menus. I recommend sampling a platter along with a bottle of Gozo wine in one of the island's cafés or wine bars.

**12 Hearing the bells of Gozo's Cathedral of the Assumption chime noon.** The noonday bells of the Cathedral of the Assumption are one of Malta's most magical sounds. Make sure you're close by to get the full effect of the chimes echoing through the Citadel's narrow lanes. *See p 42.*

**13 Catching a water taxi across the Grand Harbour.** Get down to sea level by taking a trip across the historic waters of the Grand Harbour in a 'dghajsa' (a traditional Maltese boat). You can whiz between Valletta and Vittoriosa or Senglea, or take a full cruise around the whole harbour. *See p 162.*

**14 Gazing through Gozo's Azure Window.** At Dwejra Bay, Gozo's high cliffs open out into a magnificent 99m high natural archway known as the Azure Window. Stand in front of this window and look through onto long views of Gozo's dramatic west coast as it stretches into the distance. *See p 111.*

**15 Tourist-watching from one of Valletta's pavement cafés.** Café life in Valletta spills out onto the city's large central squares. From beneath their large sun umbrellas you can linger over coffee and sticky Maltese cakes, and watch locals and tourists cruise by.

*A water taxi crossing the Grand Harbour.*

*Façade of Mosta Dome.*

**16 Enjoying a knight's eye view of Malta from the roof of Comino's St Mary's Tower.** Clamber onto the roof of this, the most isolated of the fortified defence towers built by the Knights of St John to guard over the island's shores, to gain wide views of the surrounding land and sea. *See p 80.*

**17 Running your fingers over graffiti carved into the cell walls of Gozo's Old Prison.** Staff at the Citadels' Old Prison describe the graffiti that smoothers its cells as the emotions of old prisoners carved into the walls. Pause for moment to place your hand on top of one of the old carved handprints, and feel the centuries that stand between you and the inmate of old who carved it evaporate. *See p 151.*

**18 Breathing in the fragrant air of Palazzo Parisio's garden pathways.** Palazzo Parisio is one of Malta's finest palaces, but it's this property's beautiful walled gardens that appeal most to me. Intimate and classical in design, the gardens overflow with olive trees, bougainvillea and exotic Mediterranean colour. *See p 36.*

**19 Exploring Malta's tranquil Three Villages.** Birkirkara and the Three Villages of Attard, Balzan and Lija stand side by side and are among Malta's oldest communities. A tour of these very different parishes will take you off the beaten tourist track and into the heart of Maltese village life. *See p 90.*

**20 Craning your neck to gaze at Mosta's stunning dome.** Mosta's parish church of St Mary is more popularly known as Mosta Dome because of the impressive dome that crowns its roof. The magnificence of this, the fourth largest dome in the world, can only truly be appreciated when it arches over you inside the church itself. *See p 41.*

*Hop on a Maltese bus.*

# 1 **Strategies** for Seeing the Region

# **Strategies** for Seeing the Region

**Malta is a small island that's easy to travel around** so you'll have no problems seeing a lot of it and the nearby island of Gozo as quickly or as slowly as you choose. Local time ticks past at a different pace to northern Europe and the US, and so be prepared to slow down in the afternoons and then see towns and villages spring into life again as the sun cools down. Here are some strategies to help you enrich your time and travels.

### Rule #1. Weigh up the pros and cons of hiring a car

Malta is incredibly well served by its frequent, extensive and inexpensive bus service and most visitors choose to travel by bus rather than hire a car. If you prefer to get around under your own steam, bear in mind that parking is often very limited around the tourist hot spots and that Maltese traffic police are notoriously swift at towing away any vehicle parked illegally, especially if it's blocking an all important bus route. On Gozo, however, bus services are less frequent and a car might be your best bet for travelling around.

### Rule #2. Consider an organised tour

Some visitors choose to pack in the sights via an organised tour and there are many different companies to choose from, all offering essentially the same options. Contact Malta Excursions (☎ 2577 1485, www.maltaexcursions.com) or Alliance Cruises and Tours (☎ 2133 2165, www.alliancecruises.com) for an idea of what's on offer. Jeep tours are increasingly popular and two companies specialise in these: Gozo Pride Tours (☎ 2156 4776, www.gozopridetours.com) who also run quad and biking tours in Malta, and Gozo Jeep Tours (☎ 2156 1817, www.gozo.com/jeeptours). Also consider Malta Sightseeing (☎ 2169 4967, www.maltasightseeing.com) who run two hop-on, hop-off bus services through the north and south of Malta. Tickets cost 15€ per adult, 9€ per child. Buses depart from a stand at Sliema's bus station every hour from 9am until 3pm and traverse a route through Malta's most popular

*Maltese bus.*

## Sicily in a Day

**It takes only an hour and a half to reach Sicily by ferry from Malta** and many different tour companies run day trips to this nearby island, which include a stop at Mt Etna or a visit to a Sicilian fishing village. Trips cost around 100€ per person; see Virtu Ferries (☎ 2122 8777, www.virtuferries.com) for more information.

sights, during which you can hop on and off as many times as you like during the course of the day.

### Rule #3. Siesta in the afternoon

Follow the example of the locals and take a siesta in the afternoon, especially in summer. Many shops and restaurants close at this time anyway and open up again in the early evening when many people go to church and town as village life livens up.

### Rule #4. Plan Sundays carefully

Many attractions and shops are closed on Sundays and cities such as Valletta and Mdina become virtual ghost towns. This is therefore a good day to hit the beach, take a walk or book a cruise around the island. *See p 83*.

### Rule #5. Take children into account

Many of Malta's museums and historical sites have only a limited number of interpretive boards or learning aids and resources to help young visitors engage with what's on display. Before shelling out cash for a ticket for your child, check that the attraction is something they are going to be interested in.

### Rule #6. Travel with your mobile phone

A number of sights around Malta are served by a Tourist Information Line. A small board at the sight features a telephone number that you can call from your mobile and listen to two minutes of history and information about the sight. Calls are charged at your phone operator's rates. ●

*Tour boats on Sliema waterfront.*

# 2 The Best Full-Day Tours

COMINO
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Cirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
Selmun Bay
Mellieha Bay
Salina Bay
Qalet Marku
Baħar Mediterran
Ras Ir-rgieqa
Qawra
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Paceville
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieh
Mellieħa
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Anchor Bay
Għargħur
Swieqi
St Julian's
Sliema
Bur Marrad
Manikata
Ras il-Wahx
Golden Bay
Gnejna Bay
Ġżira
VALLETTA
Ras il-Gebel
Naxxar
Ta' Xbiex
Kalkara
Mġarr
Żebbiegh
Mosta
Birkirkara
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Żabbar
Marsaskala Bay
MALTA
Santa Venera
Fgura
Paola
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Fomm ir-Rih Bay
Mtarfa
Qormi
Tarxien
Baħrija
Mdina
Rabat
Żebbuġ
Żejtun
Xrobb il-Ghagin
Luqa
Għaxaq
Marsaxlokk
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Gudja
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Migra Ferha
Siġġiewi
Mqabba
Kirkop
Marsaxlokk Bay
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Ta' Ġħen
Dingli
Birżebbuġa
Qrendi
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta' Benghajsa
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
Ghar Lapsi
Ghar Hasan
Il-Mara
0 2 mi
0 2 km
Day 1
1 Valletta
2 Vittoriosa
Day 2
3 Hal Saflieni Hypogeum & Tarxien Temples
4 Mdina
5 Paceville
Day 3
6 Golden Bay
7 Sliema
8 St Julian's
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino

**Malta is so small and well served by public transport that it's easy to cover a lot of ground in three days and stay in one place.** As such, you can expect to dip into everything this country is famous for over the course of a long weekend and not feel rushed at the end of it. The cities of Valletta, Vittoriosa and Mdina are all compact and their main attractions will introduce you to the Knights of St John, St Paul, Maltese nobility and medieval history. A half day in the Paola area provides the opportunity to take in two outstanding megalithic sites. Then escape history and grand architecture for a day and slap on the suntan cream to enjoy Malta's great outdoors. Finally, spend your evenings wandering along waterfronts or clubbing the night away.

## Day One

**1 Valletta.** Built by the Knights of St John, Malta's capital city is an essential stop on any tour of the island. Valletta's small grid of streets is easy to explore on foot and it's possible to cover a number of sights in a short period of time and still enjoy the city's renowned café culture. I recommend spending a morning and early afternoon here taking in high profile attractions such as St John's Co-Cathedral, the Grand Master's Palace and Casa Rocca Piccola. One of my favourite spots in the city is the stretch of waterfront leading from Upper Barrakka Gardens to Lower Barrakka Gardens and the Siege Bell Memorial. Here you can enjoy two of Valletta's finest gardens and its most moving monument while breathing in sweeping vistas of the Grand Harbour. ***For a full tour of Valletta, see p 120 in Chapter 6.***

*Lower Barrakka Gardens, Valletta with a view over the Grand Harbour.*

**2 Vittoriosa.** From Valletta catch either a bus or water taxi to Vittoriosa to spend the late afternoon and early evening in this small community. Vittoriosa is one of Malta's ancient Three Cities and covers one of the long thin peninsulas that points deep into the Grand Harbour. The Inquisitor's Palace is not to be missed, but most memorable of all is a meander through Il-Collachio—a maze of old narrow lanes overflowing with plant pots and history. The wine bars strewn through this district come alive in the evening. Any one of these, or the restaurants that line Vittoriosa's waterfront, make a perfect conclusion to your first day in Malta.
***Bus 1, 2, 4 or 6 from Valletta. For a full tour of Vittoriosa, see p 130 in Chapter 6.***

*Vittoriosa's Il-Collachio district.*

## Day Two

**3 Hal Saflieni Hypogeum & Tarxien Temples.** Spend the first part the day discovering some of Malta's world famous megalithic temples. The incredibly bewildering underground Hypogeum is without doubt the finest of all these sites. It's also the most accessible as a visit includes a short film on the temple, its discovery and excavation. An audio guide is provided that explains what's unfolding before your eyes as you are led through a section of the Hypogeum's underground labyrinth. In contrast, you can wander at will around the tumble of 3,000 year old ruins that make up the nearby above ground Tarxien Temples. ***Only a limited number of visitors are allowed into the Hypogeum per day and it's essential you book tickets in advance of your visit. See p 28. Bus 11 from Valletta.***

**4 Mdina.** Spend the afternoon experiencing medieval Malta in the ancient walled city of Mdina. The crowds of tourists often slacken off in the afternoon making its old narrow streets and historic sites all the more enjoyable to experience. The city's cathedral is dedicated to St Paul and suitably magnificent in stature; however, don't miss the splendidly restored Xara Palace or a walk along the thick fortifications that ring Mdina and provide long views over the island. Experience Mdina in old fashioned style via a karrozzin (traditional horse drawn carriage) ride, which also takes in neighbouring Rabat. If you want to have a romantic evening, linger in Mdina and dine at one of the city's fine restaurants. ***For a full tour of Mdina, see p 136 Chapter 6. Bus 80 or 81 from Valletta.***

**5 Paceville.** For a high adrenaline end to the day spend the evening in Paceville—the capital of Malta's nightlife. This popular district is lined with lively bars and hip clubs all of which are well frequented by locals and tourists alike and stay open well into the early hours of the morning. ***For more information see p 97.***

*Mdina street with karrozzin.*

*Golden Bay.*

## Day Three

**6 Golden Bay.** Many of Malta's attractions are closed on a Sunday, and so spend this day enjoying the island's great outdoors. Golden Bay is home to a one of my favourite beaches and there's an array of water-based activities to experience, all offering the promise of fun in or on the sea. A few minutes walk south of Golden Bay is Għajn Tuffieħa beach whose equally picturesque sands are more laid back and invite you to get down to some serious sunbathing. This region is also one of the finest places in Malta to walk. The trails leading through the cliffs surrounding Għajn Tuffieħa beach are good for short jaunts, whereas the nearby Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park is the place to tackle longer walks. Or saddle up and take a horse ride with the Golden Bay Horse Riding Stables. ***For more information, see p 63. Bus 47 from Valletta.***

**7 Sliema.** Join the locals for an early evening stroll along Sliema's Triq ix-Xatt, also known as The Strand. From this wide, landscaped waterfront you can watch the sun set and harbour life wind down for the day. ***Bus 62, 64 or 66 from Valletta.***

**8 St Julian's.** Bring the weekend to a close with a meal out at one of St Julian's many restaurants. This area is pleasantly busy most evenings and there's a wide variety of cuisines to choose from in a concentrated area and one last waterfront to enjoy. ***Bus 62, 64 or 66 from Valletta.***

*St Julian's at night.*

Day 1
1 Valletta
Day 2
2 Vittoriosa
3 Senglea
Day 3
4 Hal Saflieni Hypogeum & Tarxien Temples
5 Marsaxlokk
Day 4
6 Mosta Dome
7 Pjazza Café
8 Mdina
9 Rabat
Day 5
10 Mellieħa
11 Mellieħa Bay
Day 6
12 Victoria & the Citadel
Day 7
13 Golden Bay
14 Sliema
15 St Julian's
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
0 2 mi
0 2 km
GOZO
COMINO
Il-Ponta tal-Ahrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Selmun Bay
Cirkewwa
Mellieħa Bay
Qawra
Salina Bay
Qalet Marku
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Mellieħa
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Anchor Bay
Bur Marrad
Gharghur
St Julian's
Sliema
Swieqi
Gżira
VALLETTA
Manikata
Ras il-Wahx
Golden Bay
Naxxar
Ta' Xbiex
Kalkara
Ras il-Gebel
Mġarr
Żebbiegh
Mosta
Birkirkara
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Gnejna Bay
MALTA
Santa Vennera
Hamrun
Żabbar
Marsaskala Bay
Fommiri Rih Bay
Paola
Fgura
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Mtarfa
Qormi
Tarxien
Bahrija
Mdina
Rabat
Żebbuġ
Luqa
Ghaxaq
Żejtun
Xrobb il-Ghagin
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Marsaxlokk
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Migra Ferha
Siggiewi
Mqabba
Gudja
Kirkop
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Ta' Ghen
Dingli
Marsaxlokk Bay
Birżebbuġa
Qrendi
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta' Benghajsa
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
Bahar Mediterran
Bahar Mediterran
San Blas Bay
Żebbuġ
Marsalforn
Ghammar
GOZO
Xaghra
Ghasri
Gharb
VICTORIA (Rabat)
Nadur
Qala
San Lawrenz
Kercem
Ghanjsielem
Munxar
Xewkija
Mgarr Harbour
Xlendi
Sannat
Xlendi Bay
Mgarr ix-Xini Bay

**Seven days in Malta allows you to take time over cites such as Valletta and Vittoriosa** and, in addition to the main sights, pay a visit to some of the smaller museums and attractions. There's also time to mess about on the sands of more than one beach and discover smaller communities such as Mellieħa in the north and the fishing village of Marsaxlokk on the south east coast. And, you'll be able to stop off en route to towns and drop into attractions such as the Mosta Dome. Most importantly of all, a week allows ample time to whiz over to easy-going Gozo for a day to see its capital Victoria and the Citadel. And with such frequent bus and ferry services, it's possible to do all this and stay in one place for the week.

## Day One

1 **Valletta.** Spend the whole of your first day in Valletta and, in addition to the main sights mentioned in bullet 1 of the Long Weekend tour on p 13, squeeze in the National Museum of Fine Art and an evening in one of the city's restaurants or wine bars. Also check what's on at the Teatru Manoel as you might just be able to spend a night at the opera. ***For a full tour of Valletta see p 120 in Chapter 6.***

## Day Two

2 **Vittoriosa.** Relax over a day in Vittoriosa and take time over the highlights listed in the bullet 2 of the Long Weekend tour on p 13. The Malta at War Museum and Malta Maritime Museum are both well equipped to share the secrets of specific areas of Malta's diverse history and there'll be ample time to pay a visit to Vittoriosa's main place of worship—the Church of St Lawrence.

3 **Senglea.** If you start early, a day in this region can include a trip over Dockyard Creek to Senglea—the second of the Three Cities. Walk to the tip of the city to see one of Malta's most famous landmarks—the Vedette at Senglea Point standing guard over the Grand Harbour—and return back to its centre to call into the Church of Our Lady of Victory. ***For a full tour to Vittoriosa and Senglea, see p 130 in Chapter 6. Bus 1, 2, 4 or 6 from Valletta.***

## Day Three

4 **Hal Saflieni Hypogeum & Tarxien Temples.** See p 130, bullet 3 of the Long Weekend tour for details on a half day at these megalithic sites.

5 **Marsaxlokk.** Spend the second half of your third day in the old fishing community of Marsaxlokk. If you want to tuck into the catch of the day, arrive by lunchtime so you can dine in one of the village's excellent seafood restaurants. ***See p 88, bullet 6. Bus 27 from Valletta.***

*Vittoriosa waterfront.*

*Marsaxlokk Harbour.*

## Day Four

**6 Mosta Dome.** Make a first stop of the day at Mosta's towering parish church to gaze upon its famous dome—the fourth largest in the world. You can also discover how it miraculously survived a direct hit during World War II. *See p 41, bullet 6. Bus 47, 49, 52 or 58 from Valletta.*

### Take a Break

**7 Pjazza Café.** This buzzing upstairs café overlooks Mosta's famous dome and serves Italian cuisine plus a good range of snacks. *1st level, Pjazza Rotunda, Mosta.* ☎ *2141 3379. $.*

**8 Mdina.** Continue this day in Mdina and follow the half day highlights listed in bullet 4 of the Long Weekend tour on p 14.

**9 Rabat.** From Mdina it's a short walk to Rabat—a working town steeped in stories of St Paul, the country's patron saint. Two to three hours here is enough time to see some of the main places in Malta attached to the saint—St Paul's Church and the Grotto of St Paul dominate the town's large central square, while St Paul's Catacombs lie only minutes away. More impressive, however, are the St Agatha's Crypt and Catacombs where you can get up close to a series of detailed medieval frescos. As with most communities in Malta, Rabat's main square comes alive in the late afternoon and early evening, so stay on to soak up town life and relax over a glass of local wine or beer when the tourists have left. *For a full tour to Rabat, see p 142 in Chapter 6. Bus 80 or 81 from Valletta.*

## Day Five

**10 Mellieħa.** The first half of this day is dedicated to the northern town of Mellieħa where breezes from its nearby bay wash through steep streets and views over the north of the island and Comino open out. A series of religious sights lie at the north end of town. Start with the Church of Our Lady of Victory, then travel down a level to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa and finally keep heading down to the underground Grotto of the Madonna. The other attraction in town—the Mellieħa Shelters—is also underground. *For more on Mellieħa see p 103, bullet 15. Bus 43, 44 and 45 from Valletta.*

*Mellieħa Bay Beach.*

## The Sights of the Knights

The Knights of St John ruled Malta for over three and half centuries and their impact on the island, its culture, architecture and history is enormous. The mystique surrounding this legendary order is one of Malta's biggest draws, and their influence on the island is so far reaching that, as well as the megalithic temples and a few early medieval chapels, their collective hand has touched just about everywhere. If the purpose of your visit is to get under the knights' skin, there are a few key sights not to miss. Valletta is every inch their city and soaked with their presence. Essential visits here are St John's Co-Cathedral, the Grand Master's Palace and the adjoining Armoury. On the opposite side of the Grand Harbour in Vittoriosa, take time to explore the Il-Collachio district—the Knights' original home on Malta where remnants of their auberges still stand and the Malta Maritime Museum reveals the secrets of their naval battles. The Knights ringed the island with a chain of fortified lookout towers and the remotest restored example is Santa Marija Tower on Comino. Sneak a visit to appreciate just how lonely a Knight's life could be.

**11 Mellieħa Bay.** After all that culture, spend the afternoon kicking back on the large curve of sand that lines Mellieħa Bay and makes up one of Malta's most popular beaches. *See p 62, bullet 6. Bus 43, 44 and 45 from Valletta.*

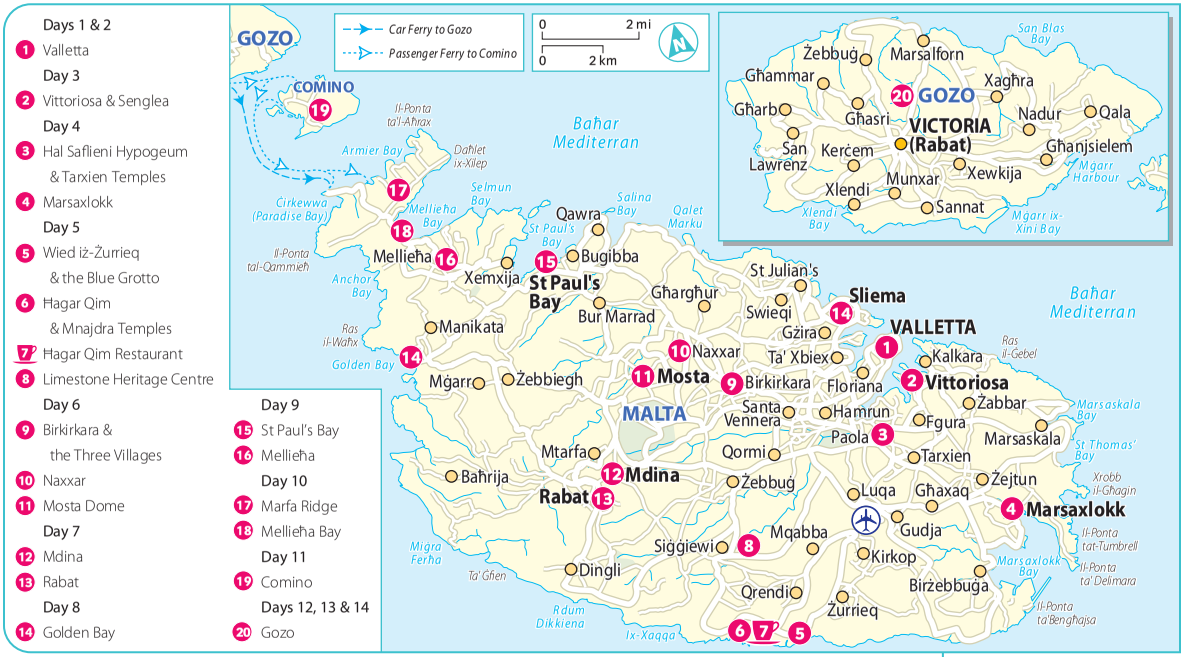
### Day Six

**12 Victoria & the Citadel—Gozo.** Travel to Gozo for a day to taste life on Malta's sister island. Unless you stay the night there's only time to visit the capital Victoria and the old city named the Citadel, which stands within it. Morning coffee in the Pjazza Indipendenza is a must before heading up to the Citadel where the Cathedral of the Assumption is the key place to see. You can also take in the Museum of Folklore and, unless the ferry back to Malta is beckoning, head back into Victoria to visit the Basilica of St George and a walk through the city's Il Borgo. *For a full tour to Victoria and the Citadel, see p 148 in Chapter 6. Bus 45 from Valletta to the ferry terminal at Ċirkewwa. For details of the ferry timetable see p 163, and on Gozo bus 25 greets the ferry at Mġarr harbour and travels to Victoria.*

### Day Seven

For your final day in Malta follow Day Three of the Long Weekend tour on p 15 to visit **13 Golden Bay, 14 Sliema** and **15 St Julian's.**

*The narrow lanes of Gozo's Citadel.*


Days 1 & 2
1 Valletta
Day 3
2 Vittoriosa & Senglea
Day 4
3 Hal Saflieni Hypogeum & Tarxien Temples
4 Marsaxlokk
Day 5
5 Wied iż-Żurrieq & the Blue Grotto
6 Ħagar Qim & Mnajdra Temples
7 Ħagar Qim Restaurant
8 Limestone Heritage Centre
Day 6
9 Birkirkara & the Three Villages
10 Naxxar
11 Mosta Dome
Day 7
12 Mdina
13 Rabat
Day 8
14 Golden Bay
Day 9
15 St Paul's Bay
16 Mellieħa
Day 10
17 Marfa Ridge
18 Mellieħa Bay
Day 11
19 Comino
Days 12, 13 & 14
20 Gozo
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
0 2 mi
0 2 km
GOZO
COMINO
Il-Ponta ta'l-Aħrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Ċirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
Selmun
Mellieħa Bay
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieħ
Anchor Bay
Ras il-Waħx
Golden Bay
Baħar Mediterran
Qawra
St Paul's Bay
Salina Bay
Qalet Marku
Mellieħa
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Manikata
Bur Marrad
Għargħur
St Julian's
Sliema
Swieqi
Ġzira
VALLETTA
Ras il-Gebel
Kalkara
Ta' Xbiex
Naxxar
Mosta
Birkirkara
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Żabbar
Marsaskala Bay
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Żebbiegħ
Mġarr
MALTA
Santa Venera
Ħamrun
Fgura
Paola
Tarxien
Qormi
Mtarfa
Baħrija
Mdina
Rabat
Żebbuġ
Luqa
Għaxaq
Żejtun
Xrobb il-Għagin
Marsaxlokk
Mqabba
Gudja
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Migra Ferħa
Siġġiewi
Kirkop
Marsaxlokk Bay
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Ta' Ġħen
Dingli
Qrendi
Birżebbuġa
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta' Benghajsa
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
San Blas Bay
Żebbuġ
Marsalforn
Għammar
Xagħra
Għarb
Għasri
VICTORIA (Rabat)
Nadur
Qala
San Lawrenz
Kerċem
Ġhanjsielem
Munxar
Xewkija
Mġarr Harbour
Xlendi
Sannat
Xlendi Bay
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay

**Flesh out the week tour of Malta by spending longer in the island's cities** and spreading out to discover more of the country's World Heritage temples. Two weeks is ample time to enjoy more of Malta's beaches and bays and spend a few days relaxing into a more rural way of life on Gozo. Make sure you squeeze in a snorkelling or walking trip to Comino and fit in evenings by the waterfronts of Sliema and St Julian's, plus a night out in Paceville anytime you choose. It is possible to complete this tour and stay in one place, but try to vary accommodation between north and south Malta and Gozo if you can.

### Days One & Two

1 **Valletta.** There are so many things to do and see and nooks and crannies to discover in Valletta that it's easy to fill two days in the city. *For a full tour of Valletta, see p 120 in Chapter 6.*

### Day Three

2 **Vittoriosa & Senglea.** For details on a full day in these cities see Day Two of Malta in One Week on p 17.

### Day Four

Follow Day Three of Malta in One Week on p 17 for a morning at the 3 **Hal Saflieni Hypogeum & Tarxien Temples** and 4 **Marsaxlokk** in the afternoon.

### Day Five

5 **Wied iż-Żurrieq & the Blue Grotto.** Catch the early morning sunshine streaming into the Blue Grotto by joining one of the boat trips that depart from the harbour at Wied iżaŻurrieq and lead through a string of caves carved into the surrounding cliffs. *See p 89, bullet 9, bus 138 and 38 from Valletta, which continues onto the Ħagar Qim and Mnajdra Temples.*

6 **Ħagar Qim & Mnajdra Temples.** The ruins of these two remote megalithic temples are among

*The Blue Grotto.*

Malta's most memorable and with only wind swept countryside surrounding them, it's possible to gain a real sense of their mystery and history. *See p 29, bullet 6.*

### Take a Break

7 ★ **Ħagar Qim Restaurant.** Standing adjacent to the temples that share its name, this local favourite restaurant serves traditional Maltese food on a large outdoor flowerpot-strewn terrace. Live music spices up the menu on Friday and Saturday evenings. *Ħagar Qim, nr Qrendi. ☎ 2142 4116. $–$$.*

8 **Limestone Heritage Centre.** Malta's history is built from limestone and this family attraction details the stone's geological past and explains how it's been put to exhaustive use over the centuries in the island's diverse architecture. *See p 90, bullet 12, bus 89 from Valletta.*

## Day Six

9 **Birkirkara & the Three Villages.** This is one of my favourite regions in Malta. Half a day spent walking through these, almost tourist free, medieval communities will introduce you to San Anton Gardens, some of the country's most distinctive parish churches all infused with an altogether more sedate way of life. *See p 90, bullet 13. Bus 40 from Valletta.*

10 **Naxxar.** The Palazzo Parisio is the not to be missed highlight in Naxxar. Spend a couple of hours being dazzled by its grandeur but leave time to take a peek inside the town's Parish Church of Our Lady. *See p 99, bullet 1. Bus 55 or 56 from Valletta.*

11 **Mosta Dome.** Round off the day with a visit to the Mosta Dome (see p 41, bullet 6). There are a couple of good dining options in town if you plan to stay on for an evening meal (see p 106). *Bus 47, 49, 52 or 58 from Valletta.*

*The Mosta Dome.*

## Day Seven

See Day Four of Malta in a Week for a day in 12 **Mdina** and 13 **Rabat** and without the stop at Mosta Dome there'll be more time to devote to these connected cities. Both have varied restaurant options so do be tempted to make a day and a night of it.

## Day Eight

14 **Golden Bay.** See Day Three of Malta in a Long Weekend on p 15.

## Day Nine

15 **St Paul's Bay.** Buġibba is a magnet for fun loving visitors who want sea and a—all be it fake—sandy beach, with no shortage of busy bars and restaurants on hand. Malta's Classic Car Museum is an unexpected and thoroughly enjoyable stop on a tour of the town, and at the other end of Buġibba, and spectrum of experiences, is Wignacourt Tower—one of the best

preserved of the Knights of St John's coastal defence towers. ***See p 102, bullet 13 and p 102, bullet 12. Bus 49 and 58 from Valletta.***

**16 Mellieħa.** Follow the coast around the expanse of St Paul's Bay, looking out for the large statue of the saint standing tall on a small offshore island. Spend the remainder of this day in Mellieħa town (see p 18 Malta in a Week Day Five, bullet 10) and if you want to dine in one of the excellent restaurants here, it's a good idea to book in advance for dinner. ***Bus 43, 44 or 45 from Valletta.***

## Day Ten

**17 Marfa Ridge.** Allow a good half day to walk around Marfa Ridge (see p 74) as, in addition to the collection of small bays where many Maltese take a break, there are sights such as the chapel, statue and cliffs at Rdum tal-Madonna to pause at, and the distinctively red St Agatha's Tower to climb. ***Bus 45 from Valletta.***

**18 Mellieħa Bay.** Recuperate from the morning's walk with an afternoon on the sands of Mellieħa Bay beach where you can explore the water sports available if you have any energy left. ***See p 62, bullet 6. Bus 44 and 45 from Valletta.***

*The narrow streets of Gozo's Citadel.*

## Day Eleven

**19 Comino.** Book an organised tour to the small rocky island of Comino—most of which concentrate on swimming or snorkelling around the glittering Blue Lagoon (see p 65, bullet 17). Cover every inch of the island via the walking

*The Blue Lagoon, Comino.*

*Ta'Kola Windmill, Xagħra.*

tour on p 78, but you might prefer to catch the ferry in order to take the walk at your own pace.

### Days Twelve, Thirteen & Fourteen

20 **Gozo.** Devote the last three days of your two weeks on Malta to Gozo. You'll definitely get more from the island if you stay, but it's easy to travel over from Malta each day if you prefer. Spend one of your three days in Victoria and the Citadel. And I suggest you divide the remaining two days between the north and south of the island. Your day in the south should include a visit to the Parish Church of St John the Baptist at Xewkija, a paddle in the sea at Xlendi, a stop at the Azure Window at Dwejra Bay and time in and around Għarb to see the Folk Museum and Basilica of Ta'Pinu. Following breakfast or early morning coffee at Marsalforn on the final day, move onto Xagħra. There are a number of attractions in this large village, but the most important to see are the Ġgantija Temples and Ta'Kola Windmill. Laze away part of the afternoon on Gozo's best beach at Ramla Bay, leaving enough time for a visit to Nadur and unrivalled views of the island from the Ta'Kennua Botanical Gardens. ●

## The Ager Foundation

Gozo's Ager Foundation is a non-profit making organisation that offers visitors a plethora of opportunities for unusual and authentic experiences of the island, all under the umbrella of eco-tourism. Through the Foundation you can spend a day with a local shepherd or fisherman, find out how local wine and foods are made and learn about the island's countryside and flora and fauna. Check the organisation's website for the full range of experiences on offer: *www.agerfoundation.com.*

# 3 The Best **Special-Interest Tours**

Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
GOZO
COMINO
Baħar Mediterran
Il-Ponta ta'l-Aħrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Selmun Bay
Cirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
Mellieħa Bay
Qawra
Salina Bay
Qalet Marku
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Mellieħa
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieħ
Anchor Bay
Ras il-Waħx
Golden Bay
Manikata
Gnejna Bay
Mġarr
Żebbieġ
Bur Marrad
Għargħur
St Julian's
Sliema
Swieqi
Gżira
VALLETTA
Ras il-Gebel
Kalkara
Vittoriosa
Żabbar
Marsaskala Bay
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Xrobb il-Għaġin
Żejtun
Marsaxlokk
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Marsaxlokk Bay
Birżebbuġa
Il-Ponta ta' Benġħajsa
Żurrieq
Qrendi
Dingli
Ta' Ġħen
Rdum Dikkiena
Migra Ferha
Siggiewi
Mqabba
Kirkop
Gudja
Għaxaq
Luqa
Żebbuġ
Qormi
Paola
Hamrun
Santa Venera
Floriana
Birkirkara
Ta' Xbiex
Naxxar
Mosta
MALTA
Mdina
Rabat
Mtarfa
Baħrija
Fomm ir-Rih Bay
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Ix-Xaqqa
Tarxien
Fgura
Ħaġar Qim & Mnajdra Temples
Ta' Ħaġrat Temples
Skorba Temples
Ġgantija Temples
Paramount Kiosk
Valletta
National Museum of Archaeology
Hal Saflieni Hypogeum
Tarxien Temples
0 2 mi
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Baħar Mediterran
GOZO
Żebbuġ
Marsalforn
Għammar
Xagħra
Għarb
Għasri
VICTORIA (Rabat)
Nadur
Qala
San Lawrenz
Kerċem
Għanjsielem
Munxar
Xewkija
Mġarr Harbour
Xlendi
Sannat
Xlendi Bay
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay
San Blas Bay

**For such a small country Malta has an impressive presence** on UNESCO's prestigious list of World Heritage sites. World Heritage aims to preserve the past to inspire and inform future generations and there are two large sites on these islands—Valletta and the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum—plus a collection of megalithic temples designated to do just that. These sites contain some of the oldest buildings in the world, predating Egypt's pyramids by around 1,000 years; however, there is currently little on hand to engage young visitors. Plans to change this at some sites are in progress and the National Museum of Archaeology fills the gaps left by the lack of interpretive boards at some stops on this tour.

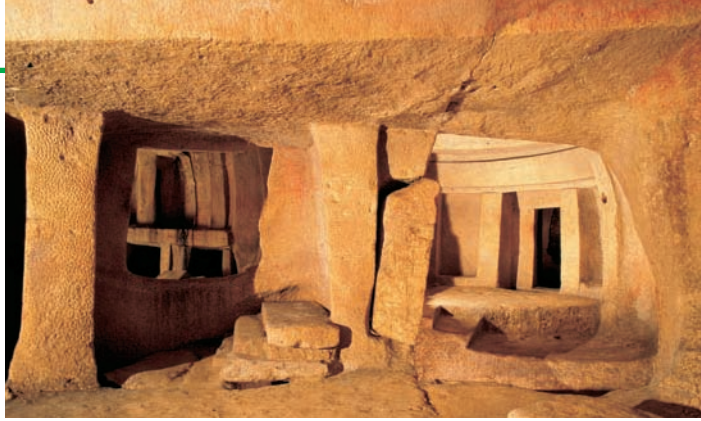
**1** ★★★ **Valletta.** Malta's distinguished Baroque capital city is our recommended place to start a World Heritage tour of the islands. Expect history to close in on all sides as you weave your way through Valletta's compact grid of narrow streets that contain an incredible 320 monuments. It's no surprise that this is the world's most concentrated historic region, which earned its place on UNESCO's list in 1980. ***For a tour of Valletta, see p 120.***

**2** **National Museum of Archaeology.** Before leaving Valletta and hot footing it to the megalithic sites, drop into this absorbing museum and learn more about the cultures that created them. Many original finds are on display including the Hypogeum's enigmatic 'sleeping lady'—a small figurine dating back to around 3000 BC that's thought to represent eternal sleep. The 'fat ladies' of Ħagar Qim, who possibly embody a fertility goddess, are also here, plus a range of more poignant personal artefacts from the temple building eras. The building itself was once the Knights'

*Decorative street corner in Valletta.*

## Further Information

Visit www.heritagemalta.org for further information on all of these sites and http://whc.unesco.org to find out more about UNESCO's World Heritage.



*Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.*

Auberge de Provence and remains one of their best preserved old properties. 🕘 ***45 min. Triq ir-Repubblika. ☎ 2122 1623. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Daily 9am–7pm.***

**3 ★★★ Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.** The subterranean Hal Saflieni Hypogeum in Paola is a short bus ride from Valletta and the jewel in the crown of Malta's UNESCO's monuments. This underground layered labyrinth of elaborately carved chambers and passageways dates back to 3600 BC and is one of the world's most haunting ancient sites. The remains of over 7,000 bodies and numerous artefacts have been excavated here, giving rise to the theory that the Hypogeum was once used as a burial chamber. A short film prepares visitors for their guided tour of the complex, whose fragile microclimate is carefully controlled to prevent further deterioration. The tour passes through the Oracle Room, a deep chamber decorated with red ochre whose Oracle Hole booms out when spoken into by a baritone voice, and the Holy of Holies, whose carved trilithons echo the standing stones of Malta's above ground megalithic temples. 🕘 ***1 hr. Tickets must be purchased in advance as admission is limited to 10 people per tour. Tickets can be bought from the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta or online at www.heritagemalta.org. Children under 6 not allowed entry. Triq iċ-Ċimiterju. ☎ 2180 5019. Admission 9.32€ adults, 4.66€ children. Last minute tickets for the noon tour are available on the day of your visit at the Hypogeum for 20€. Tours daily on the hour 9am–4pm. Bus 11 from Valletta and 427 from Buġibba.***

*Tarxien Temples.*

**4 Tarxien Temples.** A short walk from the Hypogeum, this low key site is tucked away in Tarxien's quiet back streets—don't expect much in the way of signposts. This temple complex is famous for its detailed carvings of domestic animals and spiral patterns and is thought to have been used for ritual purposes, possibly involving animal sacrifice. Cremated remains have also been unearthed here—a practice now illegal in Catholic Malta. *30 min. Triq it-Templi. ☎ 2180 5018. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Daily 9am–5pm. Bus 11 from Valletta and 427 from Buġibba.*

## Take a Break

**5 Paramount Kiosk.** Just minutes walk from both the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum and the Tarxien Temples, this large takeaway that is popular with the locals sells a varied range of fresh Maltese snacks and light meals. Eat at one of the kiosk's tables or on a shaded bench in the pjazza. *Pjazza Antoine de Paule, Paola. ☎ 2166 7025. $.*

**6 ★★ Ħagar Qim & Mnajdra Temples.** 8km south west of Tarxien, Ħagar Qim and the Mnajdra temples have stood on an exposed headland of Malta's south coast for more than 5,000 years. Ħagar Qim consists of a single circular structure of interconnected curved chambers once covered by a wooden roof. Mnajdra is a short walk west and its complex remains consist of three temples, one of which is astrologically aligned with the winter and summer solstices. Although these are Malta's best preserved megalithic temples, they are in a fairly ruinous condition. It takes only a little imagination, however, to envisage this place in the time before Christ when the magnificent buildings were, most likely, places of worship. From Mnajdra walk back to the entrance along the coast path where you can get up close to an old watch tower and enjoy uninterrupted views along Malta's craggy south coast. *45 min. Wear decent shoes as paths are rough in places. 2½km south west of Qrendi. ☎ 2142 4231. Admission 4.66€ adults, 1.16€*

*Ħagar Qim Temple.*

*Ta' Ħaġrat Temples.*

*children for each temple or 7€ for a combined ticket to both. It is the same price for children as well as adults. Daily 9am–5pm. Buses 38 and 138 from Valletta.*

**7 Ta' Ħaġrat Temples.** Only take the journey north from Ħagar Qim and Mnajdra to this tiny temple site on the outskirts of Mġarr if you're a real enthusiast. Ta' Ħaġrat consists of the remains of two small temples, both amongst Malta's earliest and both believed to have been built on the site of an even earlier village. This site's famous find is a tiny limestone model of a building and its best surviving feature is a monumental doorway. *15 min. Triq San Pietru. 2158 6264. Admission 2.33€ adults, 1.16€ children. Tues 9.30am–11am. Bus 47 from Valletta.*

**8 Skorba Temples.** The remains of these sister temples to Ta' Ħaġrat are a short distance east, in fields near the village of Żebbiegh. There's more to see at this important ancient site, including what's believed to be a shrine whose remains are older than the temples, but a good deal of imagination is required to piece it all together. *15 min. Triq Sant'Anna. 2158 0590. Admission 2.33€ adults, 1.16€ children. Tues 11.30am–1pm.*

*The ruins at Skorba.*

*Ġgantija Temples.*

## Travel

For travel between Malta and Gozo *see p 163.*

**9 ★ Ġgantija Temples.** Head over to the outskirts of Xagħra to end your tour where the temple builders began, at Malta's oldest megalithic site and its first to hit UNESCO's World Heritage List. This fragile complex is the oldest human-made, free standing structure in the world and dates from around 3600 BC. Although the ancient walls are heavily supported by scaffolding, visitors are allowed to get up close to this intriguing yet precarious site. Ġgantija's two temples share a common perimeter wall and notable features include alters, spiral carvings and libation holes through which, it is speculated, the blood of animal sacrifices once flowed. Artefacts unearthed at these temples are on display in Gozo's Museum of Archaeology (see p 150, bullet 8). ***30 min. Triq l-Imqades. ☎ 2155 3194. Admission 3.50€ adults, 1.16€ children. Daily 9am–5pm. Buses 64 and 65 from Victoria.***

# Malta's Art & Architecture— Old & New

**From the paintings of Mattia Preti to the city of Valletta,** the Baroque dominates Malta's art and architecture. Standing demurely beside its flamboyant excess, however, are also many handsome examples of medieval Maltese buildings and paintings. In addition, a clutch of modern artists and architects are making bold moves to bring the country's art and architecture up to date by making contemporary statements in the midst of their daunting cultural heritage. Starting in Valletta, this tour circles the centre of Malta and concludes at Victoria in Gozo.

## Valletta

1 ★ **National Museum of Fine Art.** Huge swathes of the art on display at this museum originally hung in properties owned by the Knights of St John. The collection starts with early 14th century frescos and ends with 20th century paintings and sculptures. Highlights include Turner's watercolour of the Grand Harbour and the largest public collection of work by Mattia Preti. The museum is housed in an old palazzo and also runs a programme of temporary contemporary exhibitions. *45 min. Triq Nofs in-Nhar. 2122 5769. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 2.33€ adults, 1.16€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.*

2 ★★★ **St John's Co-Cathedral & Cathedral Museum.** A feast of Baroque excess, St John's is the place to view Malta's most famous painting—Caravaggio's outstanding *The Beheading of St John the Baptist.* *See p 40, bullet 3.*

*St John's Co-Cathedral.*

## Mattia Preti

**Born in Calabria in 1613, celebrated Baroque artist Mattia Preti** trained in Naples and worked in Rome before moving to Malta in 1661. Preti was a lifelong 'caravaggist' and his work displays a combination of Caravaggio's chiaroscuro realism mixed with a dash of Venetian theatricality. Preti's most outstanding legacy in Malta is his depiction of the life and martyrdom of St John the Baptist, which adorns St John's Co-Cathedral's vaulted ceiling. Other fine examples of Preti's considerable artistic output can be found in numerous churches and museums throughout Malta.

*Tony's Sicilia Bar.*

3 ★★ **Teatru Manoel.** Hidden behind a plain façade so enemies wouldn't recognise it, Teatru Manoel was Valletta's only building not to be damaged in WWII. This working theatre is Europe's third oldest and its large auditorium is a feast of Baroque gilt. The theatre's chequered history, which is revealed via a guided tour, includes past lives as a cinema and doss house. However, nothing beats seeing a performance here. *30 min. Triq it-Teatru l-Antik. ☎ 2142 6389. www.teatrumanoel.com.mt. Tours 3.95€ per person. Tour times Mon–Fri every 45 min from 10.15am–3.30pm, Sat every 45 min from 10.15am–12.30pm.*

## Take a Break

4 **Tony's Sicilia Bar.** Soak up the sun and prime views over Valletta's Victoria Gate at this terrace café whose menu includes lights meals and sandwiches. *Triq San Ġwann. ☎ 2124 0569. $.*

5 ★★ **St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity.** A contemporary breath of fresh air, this vibrant centre for creativity pays its respects to the history of the 16th century fortification in which it's housed, while simultaneously making a bold new architectural statement within it. The centre's visual arts programme recognises the best in Maltese modern art and its theatre and cinema spaces inject diversity into the city's nightlife. *45 min. Triq Nofs in-Nhar. ☎ 2122 3200. www.sjcav.org. Free admission to the exhibitions. Daily 10am–9.30pm.*

6 ★ **Grand Master's Palace.** View a range of fine art including a series of 16th century frescos illustrating the Great Siege of 1565 by

## Gallarija Maltija—the Maltese Balcony

Many buildings in Malta, and especially Valletta, are crowned with a distinctive closed wooden balcony. Historians believe that, inspired by the two ornate balconies adorning the Grand Master's Palace (see p 123), builders started creating them on houses around the island from the mid-18th century. The Knights imposed regulations on the building and ornamentation of Malta's balconies, however, and by the 1960s many locals considered them to be old fashioned. The islanders' love affair with Gallarija Maltija has since rekindled and today a government grant scheme is in place to aid their restoration.

*Maltese balconies.*

the Italian artist Matteo Perez D'Aleccio. *See p 123, bullet* 12.

### Vittoriosa

*Buses 1, 2, 4 and 6 from Valletta or 627 from Sliema and Buġibba.*

7 ★★ **The Inquisitor's Palace.** Built in the 1530s to serve as the Knights' law courts, the Inquisitor's Palace is a rare surviving example of early modern architecture in Malta. *See p 131, bullet* 3.

### Żurrieq

*Buses 38 and 138 from Valletta.*

8 **Chapel of the Annunciation.** This tiny chapel is an exquisite example of a Maltese medieval church. The delicate frescos adorning the inside walls date back to the mid-15th century and were, until 1975, hidden under seven layers of whitewash. Their ongoing restoration and maintenance is the responsibility of Din l-Art Ħelwa, the National Trust of Malta, see box p 81. 🕘 *15 min. Admission free, donations welcome. Open first Sun of the month 9am–noon. Situated just under 1km from Żurrieq on the minor road to Mqabba. Take the first right hand turning at the fountain roundabout at the entrance to Żurrieqa and follow Imqabba Road to the chapel.*

### Mdina

*Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 86 from Buġibba.*

*St Paul's Cathedral, Mdina.*

*The Ballutta Buildings.*

**9 St Paul's Cathedral & Cathedral Museum.** The artistic highlight of the Cathedral Museum is a large series of detailed woodcuts by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer. ***See p 40, bullet 4.***

*Palazzo Parisio, Naxxar.*

**10 ★★★ kids Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum.** Also known as the Norman House, Palazzo Falson is Mdina's best preserved medieval building and the one time home of L'Isle Adam, the Knights' Grand Master when the order arrived in Malta in 1530. Today visitors can gaze upon over 3,500 historic objets d'art on display and the absorbing collections include paintings, furniture, jewellery and a library containing more than 4,500 volumes. The building, parts of which date back to the 13th century, embodies a Sicilian and Spanish heritage. ***1 hr. Triq Villegaignon. 2145 4512. www.palazzofalson.com. Admission 10€ adults, children 6–12 free, under-6s not allowed. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm.***

## Take a Break

**11 Fontanella Tea Gardens.** Perched on top of Mdina's historic city walls, Fontanella dishes up sweeping views alongside fine home baked cakes and light meals. ***Triq is-Sur. 2145 4264. $.***

### Naxxar

*Bus 55 from Valletta or 65 from Sliema and St Julian's.*

12 ★★★ **Palazzo Parisio.** Once described as a 'miniature Versailles', Palazzo Parisio is a flamboyant, privately owned 19th century Maltese palace. The mansion's magnificent staircase is carved from the largest piece of marble coppice on the island and the grand ballroom is decorated with so much gold it hurts your eyes. However, the real delight is the palace's splendid yet peaceful gardens whose fragrant pathways are perfect for an aimless wander. *45 min. Pjazza Vittorja, Naxxar. 2141 2461. www.palazzopariso.com. Admission 9€ adults, 6€ children. Mon–Fri 9am–6pm.*

### St Julian's

*Buses 62, 64, 66, 68 and 671 from Valletta or 70, 627 and 652 from Buġibba.*

13 ★★ **The Balluta Buildings.** Balluta Bay is about the last place you'd expect to find this large, magnificent 1920s Art Nouveau apartment block that towers over Balluta Square and is covered in fine, yet subtle, detail.

14 ★ **LOVE Sculpture.** Standing at the curve of Spinola Bay, the bold and fun LOVE sculpture is the creation of architect Richard England who also designed Valletta's St James Centre for Creativity. *See p 34, bullet 5.*

### Travel

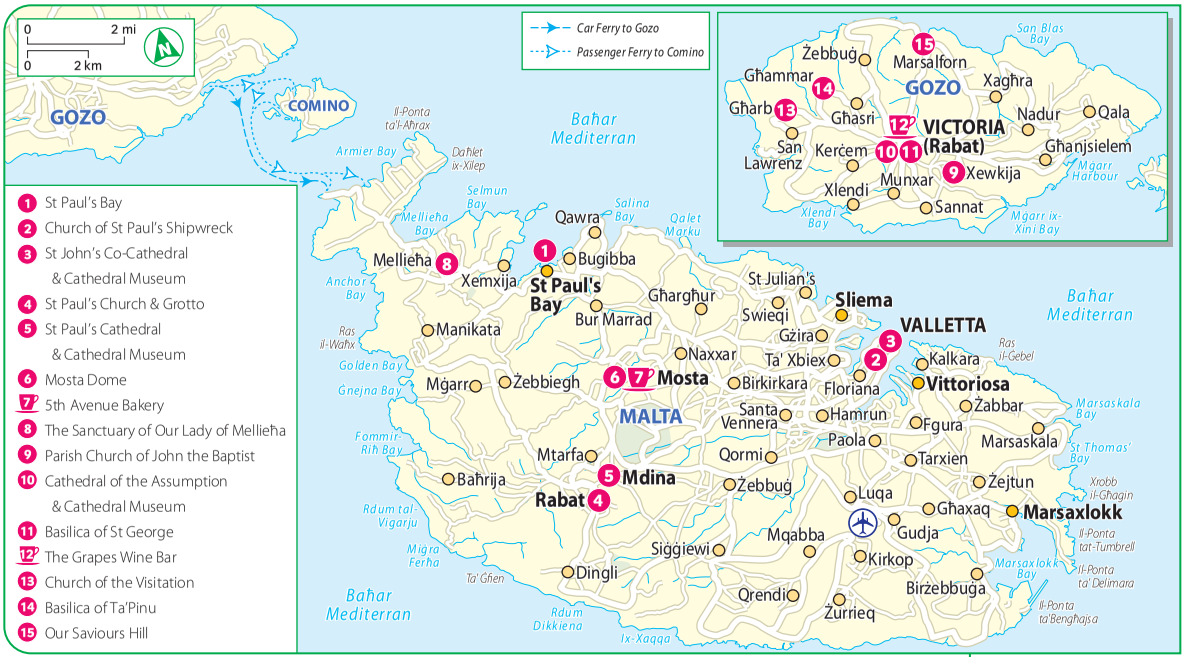
For travel between Malta and Gozo *see p 163*.

### Gozo—Victoria

15 **Teatru Astra,** *see p 150, bullet 3.*

16 ★★★ **Cathedral of the Assumption & Cathedral Museum, the Citadel,** *see p 42, bullet 10.*

*Teatru Astra, Victoria, Gozo.*




1. St Paul's Bay
2. Church of St Paul's Shipwreck
3. St John's Co-Cathedral & Cathedral Museum
4. St Paul's Church & Grotto
5. St Paul's Cathedral & Cathedral Museum
6. Mosta Dome
7. 5th Avenue Bakery
8. The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa
9. Parish Church of John the Baptist
10. Cathedral of the Assumption & Cathedral Museum
11. Basilica of St George
12. The Grapes Wine Bar
13. Church of the Visitation
14. Basilica of Ta'Pinu
15. Our Saviours Hill

**The Baroque domes of Malta's 365 churches dominate any view of the islands.** As the frontier of Christianity in Europe, Malta was the first line of defence against the Turkish Empire and has maintained its strong links with Rome. As such the Maltese are a devoutly Catholic people and each community is knitted around a frequently awe inspiring and well used parish church—all complemented by a plethora of grottos, catacombs and roadside shrines. After taking in Malta's high profile religious sites, this tour visits the best of Gozo's jaw-droppingly resplendent churches and shrines.

**1 St Paul's Bay.** Begin a Catholic tour of Malta at the spot where it all started—St Paul's Bay, named after Paul the apostle who was shipwrecked on these shores in 60 AD en route to Rome to stand trial for heresy. The site of the wreck is considered to be St Paul's island to the north of the bay and, from the shore, it's easy to spy the large statue of the saint erected here in 1845. The Church of St Paul's Bonfire on the outskirts of Buġibba marks the spot where the saint is thought to have first set foot on the mainland and on the feast day of St Paul's shipwreck (10 February), a Maltese national holiday, a bonfire is lit outside the church. A short walk east around the edge of the bay along Triq San Pawl brings you to **Għajn Rasul** (Apostle's Fountain), built on the spot where the saint is believed to have conducted his first baptism on Maltese soil. ***Buses 49 and 58 connect Buġibba bus station with Valletta, and bus 627 travels from Sliema via St Julian's to Buġibba.***

*Għajn Rasul—Apostle's Fountain.*

**2 ★★ Church of St Paul's Shipwreck.** Tucked away from Valletta's busy main shopping area, the Church of St Paul's Shipwreck is, for many, Malta's most important church. Dedicated to St Paul, this marble encrusted church is one of Valletta's oldest and most impressive places of Catholic worship. Many visit to gaze upon what is believed to be St Paul's right wrist bone and

## Visiting Malta's churches

**Maltese churches have no official opening hours. The best** times to visit are Mon–Sat 9.30am–noon or after 4pm. Most are closed to visitors on Sundays. Many churches observe a strict dress code that requires anyone dressed in shorts/mini skirts or sleeveless tops to cover bare arms and legs before entering.

part of the pillar upon which the saint was probably beheaded—complete with a silver sculpture of the saint's head resting on top. Take time to look up to the main dome and see the painted saints' golden halos glowing in the sunlight. 🕘 *30 min. Triq San Pawl—entrance on Triq Santa Luċija. ☎ 2123 6013. Admission free but donations requested. Daily 9am–7pm.*

**3 ★★★ St John's Co-Cathedral & Cathedral Museum.** Completed in 1577, St John's Co-Cathedral in the heart of Valletta is a stunning masterpiece of Baroque art and architecture and Malta's most memorable church. Behind a modest external facade lies an eye-popping interior dripping with opulence and ornamentation. Highlights include reams of intricate marble tombstones lining the cathedral's floor and a magnificent vaulted ceiling smothered with images from the life and martyrdom of St John the Baptist—the Maltese knights' favourite saint—created by Italian artist Mattia Preti. Eight side chapels, one for each langue (regional group) of the Knights of St John, boast elaborate funerary monuments dedicated to past Grand Masters. Admission includes entry to the cathedral's museum and oratory, where, despite the hype, the first glimpse of Caravaggio's masterpiece *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, will take your breath away. A collection of large Flemish tapestries based on drawings by Rubens and Poussin, and displays of sacred vestments and illuminated coral books make up the museum's main exhibits. 🕘 *1–1½ hr. Go later in the day to avoid large tour groups. No stiletto heels allowed. Triq ir-Repubblika. ☎ 2122 0536. www.stjohnscocathedral.com. Admission 5.88€, children under 12 free. Admission price includes a free audio tour. Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm, Sat 9.30am–12.30pm.*

*St John's Co-Cathedral.*

ST PAUL'S SHIPWRECK ON MALTA
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
27. 20 I HAVE FAITH IN GOD THAT IT WILL BE EXACTLY AS I HAVE BEEN TOLD.
26 WE SHALL HAVE TO RUN ON SOME ISLAND.
28. 1 AFTER WE HAD ESCAPED WE THEN LEARNED THAT THE ISLAND WAS CALLED MALTA.
2 THE NATIVES SHOWED US UNUSUAL KINDNESS.
9 THE PEOPLE OF THE ISLAND WHO HAD DISEASES CAME AND WERE CURED.
10 AND WHEN WE SAILED, THEY PUT ON BOARD WHATEVER WE NEEDED.

*Shipwreck plaque, St Paul's.*

**4 ★ St Paul's Church & Grotto.** Rabat's opulent parish church sits above a grotto where, it is believed, St Paul lived during his three month stay on Malta. Although the church is exquisite, the main draw is the grotto that was dug out by the Romans—you can still see their chisel marks in the ceiling—which contains the tantalising

## Churches in Valletta

To discover more of Valletta's magnificent churches pick up a free *Churches in Valletta* leaflet from Tourist Information (see p 166), which details eight of the city's main churches open to visitors.

remains of a 16th century fresco. The grotto is additionally revered because Pope John Paul II prayed here in 1991. 🕘 ***30 min. Visit early morning or late afternoon to avoid crowds. Misraħ il-Parroċċa, Rabat. No phone. Admission free but donations to view the grotto requested. Normal church visiting times apply (see box p 39). Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 86 from Buġibba.***

**5 ★★ St Paul's Cathedral & Cathedral Museum.** Mdina's imposing cathedral stands on the spot where, according to tradition, St Paul converted Publius, the Roman Governor of Malta, to Christianity in 60 AD. This site's original Norman church toppled during an earthquake in 1693 and in building a new cathedral Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafa created an architectural masterpiece. Mattia Preti's dazzling paintings, the *Conversion of St Paul* and the *Shipwreck of St Paul*, survived the quake and grace the cathedral's alter and chancel. Intricate marble tombs line the floor and the high vaulted ceiling is festooned with further depictions of scenes from St Paul's life. Across the square, the cathedral's museum houses an impressive collection of religious art. 🕘 ***30 min. Visit later in the day to avoid crowds. Pjazza San Pawl, Mdina. ☎ 2145 4697. Admission 2.50€ adults, children under 12 free. Cathedral open Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.45pm, Sun 3pm–4.45pm, Cathedral Museum open Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm, Sat 9.30am–3.45pm. Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 86 from Buġibba.***

**6 ★★★ Mosta Dome.** Mosta's famous parish church is crowned with the fourth largest dome in the world—its external height reaches 60m. This vast dome combined with the church's circular layout creates a lighter and more airy feel than many Maltese places of worship and infuses the church with a quiet sense of space. Enter through the church's main door in order to view its grand six-columned portico filled with a striking display of statues of saints. For information on the WWII bomb that hit Mosta Dome, see p 56. 🕘 ***20 min. No younger children allowed as silence is requested. Pjazza Rotunda. ☎ 2143 3826.***

*St Paul's Church & Grotto, Rabat.*

*Admission free but donations requested. Daily 9am–noon and 3–5pm. The numerous buses to Mosta from Valletta include 47, 49, 52 and 58 or bus 65 from Sliema and St Julian's, and bus 86 from Buġibba.*

### Take a Break

7 ★ kids **5th Avenue Bakery.** This busy bakery and café is the place to sink your teeth into seriously tempting pastries and pies. The cheesecake is irresistible and the cups of coffee are bottomless. *18 Triq Il-Kostituzijoni. ☎ 2142 2372. $.*

8 ★ **The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa.** Before heading over to Gozo, follow in the footsteps of medieval pilgrims by visiting this sacred sanctuary whose alter is adorned with a delicate fresco of the Madonna and Jesus. Legend claims St Luke painted it in 60 AD when he and St Paul were shipwrecked in Malta. Peaceful views of nearby Comino unfold from the elevated outside courtyard. *10min. Misraħ Iż-Żjara Tal-Papa, Mellieħa. No phone. Admission free. Normal church opening hours (see p 39). Buses 43, 44 and 45 from Valletta, 645 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 48 from Buġibba.*

### Travel

For travel between Malta and Gozo *see p 163.*

9 **Parish Church of John the Baptist.** Also know as the Rotunda, Xewkija's monumental church was completed in 1971 using largely volunteer labour. Its vast Baroque dome is western Gozo's major landmark and Malta's tallest dome. The church's cavernous interior is paved with Carrara marble and its nave seats 4,000 people. *30 min. Pjazza San Ġwann Battisat. No phone. Admission free. Daily 6am–noon, 4–7pm. Buses 42 and 43 from Victoria.*

10 ★★★ **Cathedral of the Assumption & Cathedral Museum.** Not to be outdone by any place of worship Malta has to offer, Gozo's majestic cathedral presides over the Citadel's main

*The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa.*

*Parish Church of John the Baptist, Xewkija.*

square. Behind an elegant façade, huge crystal chandeliers dominate the cathedral's light and lofty interior. The highlight is its fake dome—an ingenious trompe l'oeil painting created when funds to construct a real dome ran out. The cathedral's museum is a short distance along Triq il-Fossos and contains a collection of large pieces of church silver and a small display of religious art. ***45 min. Misraħ il-Katidra, Xewkija. 2155 6087. Admission 3€ adults, children free, includes a free audio tour. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm. Bus 25 from the ferry terminal in Mġarr.***

**11 ★★ Basilica of St George.** Victoria's richly decorated parish church maintains a deep sense of peace despite being well used and much visited. The altar is crowned by an unusual black and gold canopy and dominated by Mattia Preti's striking painting *St George and the Dragon*. ***15 min. Pjazza San Ġorġ. No phone. www.stgeorge.org.mt. Free admission. Smart dress code to be observed. Normal church opening times (see box p 39). Bus 25 from the ferry terminal in Mġarr.***

## Take a Break

**12 ★★ The Grapes Wine Bar.** Sample a platter of Gozo cheese and glass of local wine at this quirky wine bar sprawled over the square in front of the Basciallia. ***Pjazza San Ġorġ. 7947 3503. $$.***

**13 ★ Church of the Visitation.** Għarb's charming Baroque parish church dominates the village's main square and is an appealing example of the magnificent places of worship found at the centre of all Gozo's tiny, traditional villages. Statues depicting Faith, Hope and Charity adorn its unusual concave façade, which is framed by two bell towers. ***Open daily for services 6am–8.30am and 5pm–7pm. Buses 1, 2 and 91 from Victoria.***

**14 ★★ Basilica of Ta'Pinu.** Standing in open countryside around Għarb's western outskirts, this huge basilica is a monument to the Virgin Mary and an important place of pilgrimage. It was constructed in the early 20th century on the site of an old medieval chapel where a local fieldworker claimed to have heard the voice of the Madonna. Take time to ascend Ta Għammar hill opposite the Basilica marked by marble statues depicting the Stations of the Cross. ***45 min. Triq ta'Pinu. 2155 6187. www.tapinu.org. Admission free. Daily 6.30am–12.15pm and 1.30–7pm. Bus 91 from Victoria via Għarb.***

**15 Our Saviours Hill.** Before leaving Gozo travel north from Victoria to see the 12m high statue of Christ erected in the 1970s on top of a small hill known as tas-Salvatur on the outskirts of Marsalforn. ***Bus 21 from Victoria.***

Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
0 2 mi
0 2 km
GOZO
COMINO
Il-Ponta ta'l-Ahrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xlejp
Baħar Mediterran
Selmun Bay
Cirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
Mellieħa Bay
Salina Bay
Qalet Marku
Qawra
St Paul's Bay
Mellieħa
Xemxija
Bugibba
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieħ
Anchor Bay
St Paul's Bay
Ġharghur
St Julian's
Sliema
Manikata
Bur Marrad
Swieqi
VALLETTA
Ras il-Wahx
Golden Bay
Ġnejna Bay
Naxxar
Ta' Xbiex
Gżira
Kalkara
Ras il-Gebel
Mġarr
Żebbiegh
Mosta
Birkirkara
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Żabbar
MALTA
Ħamrun
Fgura
Marsaskala Bay
Fomm ir-Riħ Bay
Paola
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Mtarfa
Qormi
Tarxien
Żejtun
Baħrija
Mdina
Żebbuġ
Luqa
Rabat
Ġħaxaq
Marsaxlokk
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Mqabba
Gudja
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Migra Ferħa
Dingli
Siġġiewi
Kirkop
Marsaxlokk Bay
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Ta' Ġħen
Birżebbuġa
Qrendi
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta' Benġħajsa
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
Ġhar Lapsi
Ġhar Hasan
Il-Minkba
Il-Mara
San Blas Bay
Żebbuġ
Marsalforn
Ġħammar
Xagħra
Ġħarb
Ġħasri
Nadur
Qala
San Lawrenz
Kerċem
Ġħanjsielem
Munxar
Xewkija
Mġarr Harbour
Xlendi
Sannat
Xlendi Bay
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay
1 Valletta and Floriana Gardens
2 San Anton Gardens
3 Palazzo Parisio
4 Caffe Luna
5 Howard Gardens
6 Buskett Gardens
7 Elysium Tree Nursery & Gaia Foundation
8 Is-Simar Nature Reserve
9 Għadira Nature Reserve
10 Rundle Gardens
11 Ta' Kenuna Botanical Gardens

**The Maltese islands are home to a small collection of fine** gardens and nature reserves. Some pride themselves on supporting indigenous species, while others are crammed with the unusual and exotic. Many were originally designed by the Knights for pleasure or sport and some sit within Malta's many fortifications, offering prime views alongside fragrant tranquillity.

## Malta

**1 For a mini tour of the Valletta and Floriana Gardens,** *see p 122.*

**2 ★★ San Anton Gardens.** San Anton is Malta's largest garden. Its formal grid of pathways is surrounded by a high external wall and punctuated by large Baroque fountains. Peacock cries from a small aviary drift through the garden's calm atmosphere and a collection of stone monuments peek out from between the trees. A froth of plants line the steps that lead to the adjacent palace which was once the official residence of the British Governor and is now home to the Maltese president. *30 min. Triq Birbal, Attard. No phone. Admission free. Open daily dawn to dusk. Bus 40 from Valletta.*

**3 ★★★ Palazzo Parisio.** The gardens of this opulent estate in Naxxar are just as distinguished as its grand palace. *See p 22, bullet 10.*

*San Anton Gardens, Attard.*

### Take a Break

**4 ★★ Caffe Luna.** A simply delightful, if slightly formal, canopied café nestled inside Palazzo Parisio's inviting gardens. Expect to experience first class Italian fare in fragrant surrounds. *Pjazza Vittorja, Naxxar. 2141 2461. $–$$*

**5 kids Howard Gardens.** Perched around Mdina's bastions these busy gardens, named after Malta's first Prime Minister, provide a landscaped, palm filled, border between the city and neighbouring Rabat. Look out for the Norman pillar which, tradition claims, was erected in the 11th century after the Moors were driven out of Malta. *20 min. Triq il-Mużew, Rabat. Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 86 from Buġibba.*

**6 kids ★★ Buskett Gardens.** Buskett is located in a fertile valley south of Rabat and is Malta's only woodland. The gardens lie in the shadow of Verdala Palace—built by the Knights in the 15th century, the palace is now the Maltese president's summer residence. The Knights also created Buskett to serve as a hunting ground and a place where they could train their famous falcons. Today Buskett's many groves of pine, oak, olive and orange trees are popular recreation areas. If you visit the gardens on 28 or 29 June (the feast of Saints Peter and Paul), expect to be immersed in the festival of L-Imnarja—a large,

*Buskett Gardens in the shadow of Verdala Palace.*

family orientated party filled with singing, dancing, music and local food. 🕘 *1 hr. Triq l-imnarja 2½km south of Rabat. No phone. Admission free. Open at all times. Bus 81 from Valletta via Rabat.*

**7 Elysium Tree Nursery & Gaia Foundation.** The Elysium Project, managed by the Gaia Foundation, propagates trees and shrubs native to the Maltese Islands and works to reduce negative environmental impact on protected sites including the cliffs surrounding Għajn Tuffieħa Bay. Visitors can view indigenous plants at the nursery, which also sells organic veg and herbs. 🕘 *15 min. Għajn Tuffieħa Road, Għajn Tuffieħa.* ☎ *2158 4474. www.projectgaia.org. Admission free. Open Mon and Sat 9am–1pm, Tues–Fri 8am–2.30pm. Buses 47 and 52 from Valletta, and 652 from Sliema and St Julian's via Buġibba.*

**8 Is-Simar Nature Reserve.** Bird Life Malta have transformed what was once a neglected patch of marshland into a thriving wildlife sanctuary. A variety of habitats support native species of birds, reptiles and fish, all of which can be enjoyed via a nature trail and bird watching hides. 🕘 *30 min. Set back from Pwales beach at Xemxija, St Paul's Bay.* ☎ *2134 7646. www.birdlife malta.org. Admission free, donations welcome. Open Sun Nov–May 10am–4pm. Buses 44 and 45 from Valletta, 645 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 48 from Buġibba.*

**9 Għadira Nature Reserve.** Volunteers lead visitors on guided walks along a nature trail that snakes through this natural floodplain. Around 200 different species of birds have been spotted in this wetland sanctuary where many will stay for winter. 🕘 *30 min. The*

## Bird Life Malta

**Malta lies on one of the world's major bird migration routes and** hunting and trapping birds has long been a popular pastime for many islanders. Laws have been introduced to protect many species, but these are largely ignored and difficult to enforce and millions of birds are killed each year. Many visitors and locals object to this annual slaughter but if you come across a hunter while out walking in the islands and are offended by the sport, don't try to stop them. The best way to help is to make a donation to Bird Life Malta (*www.birdlifemalta.org*) who are working to fully implement EU laws against spring hunting and trapping.

## Wine Tasting in Malta

Malta is a prolific wine producing country and home to numerous vineyards. If you're interesting in wine tasting, tours of cellars can be booked with various local producers:

**Emmanuel Delicata Wines,** book in advance by phone (☎ 2182 5199) or via the website (www.delicata.com).

**Meridiana Wine Estates,** book in advance by phone (☎ 2141 3550) or via the website (www.meridiana.com.mt).

**Marsovin Ltd,** book in advance via the website (www.marsovin.com).

*southern end of Mellieħa Bay on the other side of the road from the beach. ☎ 2134 7646. www.birdlife malta.org. Admission free, donations welcome. Open Dec and Jan Sat and Sun 9.30am–3.30pm, Feb–Mar and Nov 10.30am–4.30pm. Buses 44 and 45 from Valletta, 645 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 48 from Buġibba.*

### Travel

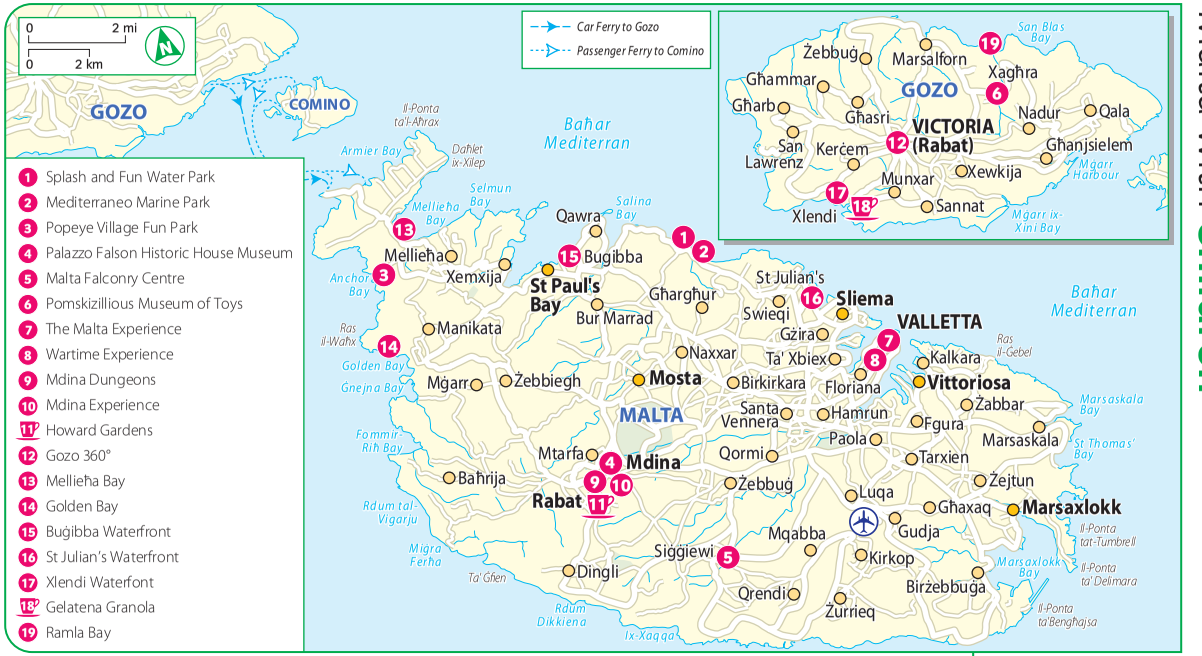
For travel between Malta and Gozo *see p 163.*

### Gozo

**10 Rundle Gardens.** These small, tranquil Mediterranean gardens are only two blocks from the centre of Victoria, and yet the bustle of the city falls away the moment you step onto its tree lined pathways. Carefully planned flower beds provide riotous year round colour and the parks' many shaded benches are perfect places to tuck into a picnic or simply take a break. At the time of writing Rundle Gardens are undergoing renovation but remain a pleasant, shady spot. 🕘 *15 min. South of Triq ir-Repubblika. No phone. Free admission. Daily 6am–8pm in summer and 7am–6pm in winter. Bus 25 from the ferry terminal in Mġarr.*

**11 Ta' Kenuna Botanical Gardens.** Straddling the cliffs on the western outskirts of Nadur, these small botanical gardens are filled with plants indigenous to Malta, which are grouped according to the habitat in which they grow in the wild. However, the real reason to make the journey 130m above sea level to get here, is to take in the sweeping panoramic views of Gozo, Comino and Malta that these gardens provide. 🕘 *10 min. Torri Ta' Kenuna. Buses 42 and 43 from Victoria to Nadur.*

*Ta'Kenuna Botanical Gardens, Nadur, Gozo.*


0 2 mi
0 2 km
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
GOZO
COMINO
Il-Ponta ta'l-Ahrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Selmun Bay
Mellieha Bay
Salina Bay
Anchor Bay
Ras il-Wahx
Golden Bay
Gnejna Bay
Fommit Rih Bay
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Migra Ferha
Ta' Ghen
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
Baħar Mediterran
Mellieħa
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Qawra
Manikata
Bur Marrad
Mġarr
Żebbiegh
Mosta
Naxxar
Mdina
Rabat
Baħrija
Dingli
Mtarfa
Siġġiewi
Qrendi
MALTA
Birkirkara
Santa Venera
Qormi
Żebbuġ
Mqabba
Dingli
Ħaż-Żabbar
Ħal Qormi
Ħal Luqa
Ħal Kirkop
Ħal Safi
Ħal Żurrieq
Ħal Ħaxaq
Ħal Gudja
Ħal Tarxien
Ħal Paola
Ħal Ħamrun
Ħal Floriana
Ħal Ta' Xbiex
Ħal Gżira
Ħal Swieqi
Ħal Ta' Giorgju
Ħal Sliema
St Julian's
Ħal Għargħur
VALLETTA
Ras il-Gebel
Kalkara
Vittoriosa
Żabbar
Marsaskala
Marsaskala Bay
St Thomas' Bay
Żejtun
Marsaxlokk
Marsaxlokk Bay
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Il-Ponta ta' Benghajsa
Birżebbuġa
Ħal Għaxaq
Ħal Nadur
Ħal Qala
Ħal Għajnsielem
Mġarr Harbour
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay
Ħal Munxar
Ħal Xewkija
Ħal Sannat
Ħal Xagħra
Ħal Marsalforn
Ħal Żebbuġ
Ħal Għammar
Ħal Għarb
Ħal Għasri
Ħal Kerċem
Ħal San Lawrenz
Xlendi
San Blas Bay
1 Splash and Fun Water Park
2 Mediterraneo Marine Park
3 Popeye Village Fun Park
4 Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum
5 Malta Falconry Centre
6 Pomskizillious Museum of Toys
7 The Malta Experience
8 Wartime Experience
9 Mdina Dungeons
10 Mdina Experience
11 Howard Gardens
12 Gozo 360°
13 Mellieħa Bay
14 Golden Bay
15 Buġibba Waterfront
16 St Julian's Waterfront
17 Xlendi Waterfront
18 Gelatena Granola
19 Ramla Bay

**Children are an important part of Maltese life and even** though many of its cultural attractions have more appeal to adults, don't overlook everything there is for young visitors to enjoy. Family beach holidays focus around the island's sandy bays and lively waterfronts. Active families can enjoy a range of outdoor pursuits, and a smattering of indoor attractions will occupy all ages on rainy days. This tour includes Malta's family-friendly attractions and touches on the best beaches for children—for which further information can be found in Chapter 4.

## Family-friendly Attractions
### Malta

**1 ★★ Splash and Fun Water Park.** Spend a day whizzing down water slides, swimming in a large wave pool or taking it easy on the lazy river at this popular water park. Children's Splash Land caters for young ones and on land activities will occupy those who don't want to get wet. Half day passes apply after 1pm in low season and after 3pm in high season. *2 hr–all day. Coast Road, Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq. 7937 4283. www.splashandfun.com.mt. Full day passes 18€ adults, 10€ children; half day passes 10€ adults, 6€ children. Open daily low season (May–June and Sept–Oct) 9.30am–5.30pm, high season (July and August) 9am–9pm. Buses 68 from Valletta, 70 and 645 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 70 from Buġibba.*

**2 ★★ Mediterraneo Marine Park.** A collection of bottlenose dolphins are the stars of this park and visitors should organise a visit around their show times. Sea lions and parrots also perform at various times throughout the day and a reptile house and children's amusements entertain visitors between shows. Adults and children aged over 8 can undertake a swim with the dolphins—book in advance. *half–full day. Coast Road, Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq. 2137 6519. www.mediterraneo.com.mt. Admission 15.50€ adults, 10.50€ children.*

*Splash and Fun Water Park.*

## Ticket Deal

The Splash and Fun Water Park and neighbouring Mediterraneo Marine Park sell combined full day passes to both attractions for 22€ adults, 15€ children.

*Popeye Village.*

*Swim with the dolphins 120€. Open daily Mar–Oct 10am–5pm, Nov, Dec and Feb 10am–1.30pm, closed Mon Dec–Feb. Buses 68 from Valletta, 70 and 645 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 70 from Buġibba.*

**3 Popeye Village Fun Park.** Most children won't remember the 1980 Robin William's film *Popeye*, which transformed Anchor Bay into the set of Sweethaven Village. Since filming the set has had a new lease of life as a family fun park complete with animation shows, a lido and splash pool. Adults can escape to the park's winery. 🕘 *half–full day. Anchor Bay.* ☎ *2152 4782. www.popeyemalta.com. Admission 11.50€ adults, 9€ children. Open daily August 9.30am–7pm, March–July, Sept and Oct 9.30am–5.30pm, Nov, Jan and Feb 9.30am–4.30pm. Bus 441 from Mellieħa Bay.*

**4 ★★★ Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum.** A free activity book for children aged 6–12 is included along with entrance to this fascinating historic house. *See p 36, bullet 10.*

**5 ★ Malta Falconry Centre.** Dedicated to bringing the ancient art of falconry back to Malta, this centre is the place to learn all about these noble birds and see them in flight. The centre's aviaries are also home to owls, eagles, vultures and hawks and injured rescue birds are nursed back to health. Bring a picnic to enjoy in the grounds. 🕘 *2 hr. Triq i-Imqabba, Siġġiewi.* ☎ *2146 0985. www.maltafalconrycentre.com. Admission 6€ adults, 3.50€ children. Open daily 9am–5pm, closed mid-Dec–mid-Jan, display times 11am and 2pm. Bus 89 from Valletta.*

*Mdina Dungeons.*

## Gozo

**6 Pomskizillious Museum of Toys.** Edward Lear invented the word Pomskizillious, when describing Gozo's coastal scenery during a visit in 1866. The toy museum named after his made up word started in the 1970s with one doll and now features all kinds of toys from all over the world. The collection, which includes figurines from the 1790s and a model Hornby

train set, will also appeal to adults. *30 min. Triq Ġnien Xibla, Xagħra. 2156 2489. Admission 2€ adults, 1€ children. Open April, Oct and Nov Thurs–Sat 10am–1pm, May Mon–Sat 10am–1.30pm, June–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–1.30pm and 4–6pm. Dec Sat 10.30am–1.30pm. Buses 64 and 65 from Victoria.*

## Multimedia Shows

### Malta—Valletta

**7 ★★ The Malta Experience.** This audiovisual presentation recounts Malta's long and rich history and some of the islands' best scenic attractions in a fun and entertaining show. This is a good way for children to learn more about the country without getting bored. *Triq il-Mediterran. 2124 3776. www.themaltaexperience.com. Admission 8.15€ adults, 4.05€ children. Mon–Fri shows on the hour 11am–4pm, Sat and Sun shows 11am, noon and 1pm.*

**8 Wartime Experience,** *see p 55, bullet 1.*

### Mdina

**9 Mdina Dungeons.** Children who love the macabre will enjoy this gruesome attraction housed in underground passageways beneath the Magisterial Palace. Delve deep into the dark side of the Silent City's history on the very spot where the recreated horrors were once committed. *30 min. Pjazza San Publiju. 2145 0267. www.dungeonsmalta.com. Admission 4€ adults, 2€ children. Open daily 10am–4.30pm. Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Silema and St Julian's, and 66 from Buġibba.*

**10 Mdina Experience.** One of Mdina's better audiovisual shows, the Mdina Experience recounts the city's rich history in glorious cinematic style. *25 min. Misraħ Mesquita. 2145 0055. www.themdinaexperience.com. Admission 4.66€ adults, 2.33€ children. Daily 10am–4.30pm, shows every 45 min. Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Silema and St Julian's, and 66 from Buġibba.*

## Take a Break

**11 ★ Howard Gardens.** At the east side of these busy gardens is a children's play area complete with a popular takeaway stall that sells ice creams. *$. See p 45, bullet 5.*

### Gozo—Victoria

**12 Gozo 360°.** Gozo's own sound and vision extravaganza that brings images of island life and history to the big screen. *25 min. Citadel Theatre, Telgħa Tal-Belt. 2155 9955. www.citadelcinema.com. Admission 4.07€ adults, 1.97€ children. Mon–Sat 10.30am–4pm.*

*Golden Bay.*

*Lido, St Julian's waterfront with the Balutta Buildings in the background.*

### Beaches & Waterfronts
**Malta**

⓭ **Mellieħa Bay.** The shallow waters of this expansive bay are perfect for children who love to swim and paddle. The wide beach is family friendly and offers an array of fun water based activities along with ample space just to play in the sand. *See p 62, bullet* ⑥.

⓮ ★★ **Golden Bay.** This lively sandy bay is recommended for

## Playmobil in Malta

Playmobil—complex but cute moving figures—were the brain child of Hans Beck the Head of Development for German toy company Horst Brandstätter. In 1974 the first series of characters were launched and consisted of Native Americans, medieval knights and construction workers (the German packaging for the construction workers proved controversial as it showed them discussing their beer consumption).

Production of these classic toys began in Malta two years later and since then Playmobil has grown to become one of the world's top toy brands with the range developing to include fantasy figures, nationalist heroes from around the world and a wide range of workers and professionals. Today over 700 people work at the Maltese factory where they produce 50 million figures a year and the adjoining Playmobil Funpark is a rainy day option for families with young children. Here you'll find both play and shopping areas—look out for the special edition Playmobil Knight which is only available in Malta—and dining facilities which are over looked by giant chef figures. The park is located on the outskirts of Hal Far just south of Malta's airport (number 13 bus from Valletta) and is open daily year round. ☎ 2224 2445; www.playmobilmalta.com.

families who enjoy sharing a beach with plenty of young people. A wide range of water sports suitable for all ages is on offer and brings some families back again and again. For details of the Golden Bay horse riding stables, who welcome families on their rides, see p 68, bullet 3.

15 **Buġibba Waterfront.** With rides including dodgem cars and other attractions, Buġibba's waterfront is a good choice for older children and teenagers. ***See p 62, bullet 5.***

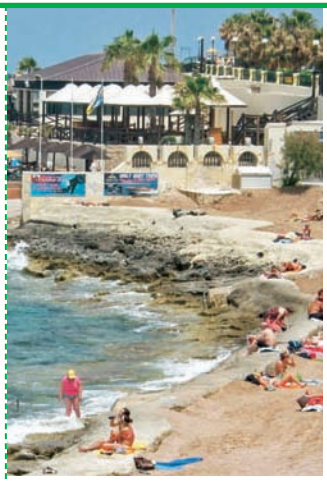
16 **St Julian's Waterfront.** The numerous lidos dotted along this rocky shoreline are recommended for families who enjoy swimming but don't like getting sand in their toes. ***See p 61, bullet 2.***

### Gozo

17 **Xlendi Waterfront.** A recommended choice for families with young children because the shallow, protected waters make for safe paddling with toddlers. ***See p 64, bullet 15.***

### Take a Break

18 **Gelatena Granola.** Located next door to the entrance of St Patrick's hotel in Xlendi, this colourful stall sells around 50 flavours of lip-smackingly good ice cream, plus fresh fruit and smoothies. ***Xatt ix-Xlendi. No phone. $.***



*Buġibba's waterfront.*

19 ★★★ **Ramla Bay.** Ramla Bay is Gozo's most family friendly beach. It's served by good facilities and you'll find plenty of room on its sands to spread out and play games. ***See p 64, bullet 11.***

*Xlendi waterfront, Gozo.*

GOZO
Għasri
VICTORIA (Rabat)
Nadur
Qala
Ras tl-Qala
Għanjsielem
Munxar
Xewkija
Xlendi
Sannat
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay
COMINO
Il-Ponta ta'l-Aħrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Ċirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
Selmun Bay
Mellieħa Bay
Mellieħa
Qawra
Salina Bay
St Paul's Bay
Qalet Marku
Bugibba
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieħ
Anchor Bay
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Ras il-Waħx
Manikata
Bur Marrad
Għargħur
St Julian's
Swieqi
Sliema
Golden Bay
Ġnejna Bay
Naxxar
Gżira
VALLETTA
Mġarr
Żebbiegh
Mosta
Ta' Xbiex
Kalkara
Ras il-Ġebel
Birkirkara
MALTA
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Fomm ir-Riħ Bay
Santa Vennera
Hamrun
Żabbar
Mtarfa
Baħrija
Mdina
Rabat
Qormi
Paola
Fgura
Marsaskala Bay
Tarxien
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Żebbuġ
Luqa
Għaxaq
Żejtun
Xrobb l-Għagin
Migra Ferha
Siġġiewi
Mqabba
Gudja
Marsaxlokk
Ta' Għen
Dingli
Kirkop
Marsaxlokk Bay
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Rdum Dikkiena
Qrendi
Birżebbuġa
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta'Benghajsa
Ix-Xaqqa
Għar Lapsi
Il-Minkba
Baħar Mediterran
Baħar Mediterran
Grand Harbour
VALLETTA
Triq Britanja
Triq San Gwann
Triq Santa Lucija
Triq it-Tiġrut l-Qadim
Triq Id-Dejqa
Triq Ir-Repubblika
Triq l-Arcisqof
Triq San Kristofru
Triq San Duminku
Triq San Nikola
T. l-Isparl-Qadim
Triq l-Merkanti
Castille Sq
Triq San Pawl
St Ursula St
East St
0 2 mi
0 2 km
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
1 Wartime Experience
2 Siege Bell Memorial
3 Casa Rocca Piccola
4 Malta at War Museum
5 Mosta Dome
6 Aviation Museum
7 The Mġarr Shelter
8 Mellieħa Shelters
9 Pizzeria al Ponte
10 Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum

**Malta's vital strategic position over supply lines in the** central Mediterranean meant that the country was heavily bombed during WWII. The islands suffered 3,000 alerts and were pounded by 17,000 tonnes of enemy bombs. Malta's darkest hour came in 1942 when the nation endured 154 continuous days of bombing and teetered on the brink of surrender. In recognition of the islanders' bravery, King George VI awarded the entire nation the George Cross on 15 April 1942.

**1 kids Wartime Experience.** Start this tour with a multimedia show that brings to life Malta's WWII history. The Wartime Experience features vintage film and photography and recounts the island's hardships and endurance in big screen style. *45 min. Triq Santa Luċija. 2122 2225. www.embassycomplex.com.mt. Tickets 5.20€ adults, 3.49€ children. Screenings daily at 10am, 11am, noon and 1pm.*

**2 Siege Bell Memorial.** Overlooking the mouth of the Grand Harbour near Lower Barrakka Gardens, this striking but sombre memorial remembers all those who died during WWII's siege of Malta. The large bells toll daily at noon—don't stand too near—and an adjacent tomb pays its respects to the many Maltese fatalities. *15 min. Triq il-Mediterran. No phone. Admission free. Daily 9am–5pm.*

**3 ★★ Casa Rocca Piccola.** View three WWII bomb shelters built deep into the basement of this 16th-century palazzo. *See p 124, bullet 15.*

*Siege Bell Memorial, Valletta.*

**4 ★★ kids Malta at War Museum.** This absorbing museum is tucked in between two of Vittoriosa's imposing three gates. Visitors can travel 12m underground to discover rock-hewn tunnels which sheltered islanders during bombing

## Museum Closure

At the time of writing Valletta's National War Museum is closed for restoration work and the Lascaris War Rooms are closed until further notice. Check www.visitmalta.com or Tourist Information *(see p 166)* for up to date information.

## WWII Dive Sites

**The waters surrounding Valletta contain two WWII wrecks. The** British destroyer HMS Maori, one of Malta's most famous wrecks, went down on 12 February 1942 close to Fort St Elmo, and the Carolita Barge was moored near Manoel Island when it was torpedoed on 21 April of the same year. Both wrecks are popular dive sites. For more information on diving in Malta, see p 83.

raids and view a large collection of memorabilia from the era. A visit also includes a 30-minute wartime movie. 🕘 *1hr. Couvre Porte, Vittoriosa.* ☎ *2189 6617. www.wirartna.org. Admission 7€ adults, 6€ children. Daily 10am–5pm. Guided tours on the hour. Bus 1, 4 and 6 from Valletta.*

5 ★★ **Mosta Dome.** During a bombing raid over Malta on 9 June 1942, Mosta Dome was struck by three bombs. Two deflected off the church into the square and a third pieced the dome itself and rolled into the church where 300 parishioners were attending mass. All three bombs failed to explode and a replica of the bomb that entered the church, plus a collection of photographs of the damage it caused, are on display in the sacristy, left of the altar. *See p 41, bullet 6.*

6 ★ **Aviation Museum.** This friendly museum documents Malta's aviation history from the country's first recorded flight on 13 February 1915. The WWII section includes a Supermarine Spitfire, which was recovered from a local scrapyard and restored, and more incredibly, a Hawker Hurricane that had lain in the sea near the Blue Grotto for 45 years before being retrieved and

*Malta at War Museum, Vittoriosa.*

*Underground classroom in the Mġarr shelter.*

fully restored. Both are now housed in the Air Battle of Malta Memorial hanger. 🕘 *30min. Ta'Qali, a short walk from the craft village.* ☎ *2141 9374. www.maltaaviationmuseum.com. Admission 5€ adults, 1.50€ children. Daily 9am–5pm. Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 86 from Buġibba.*

**7** kids **The Mġarr Shelter.** Mġarr's air raid shelter lies 12m underground and is one of Malta's largest. The shelter was dug by hand and its labyrinth of tunnels have been carefully restored to provide a sense of what it was like for the many families who spent countless long hours sheltering here during enemy attacks. 🕘 *30min. Triq il-Kbira, enter through Barri Restaurant.* ☎ *2157 3225. Admission 2.33€ adults, 1.16€ children. Tues–Sat 9am–2pm, Sun 10am–11.30am. Bus 47 from Valletta.*

**8** kids **Mellieħa Shelters.** Another underground complex of corridors and anti blast chambers carved deep into local limestone to shelter Maltese citizens during WWII. Mannequins are in place in some sections to help convey underground life during the raids. 🕘 *30min. Triq il-Madonna tal-Għar.* ☎ *7952 1970. www.mellieha.info/shelters. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Mon–Sat 9am–3.30pm. Buses 43, 44 and 45 from Valletta, 645 from Sliema and St Julian's. and 48 from Buġibba.*

## Take a Break

**9** **Pizzeria al Ponte.** This pleasant and popular pizzeria is in the centre of Mellieħa and has a decent children's menu and cracking desserts. *Triq Ġorġ Borg Oliver and Triq Adenau.* ☎ *2152 0923. $–$$.*

## Travel

For travel between Malta and Gozo *see p 163.*

**10** **Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum.** Nadur's Maritime Museum is the place to discover more about the WWII battleships connected to Malta's naval history. *See p 114, bullet* **17**.

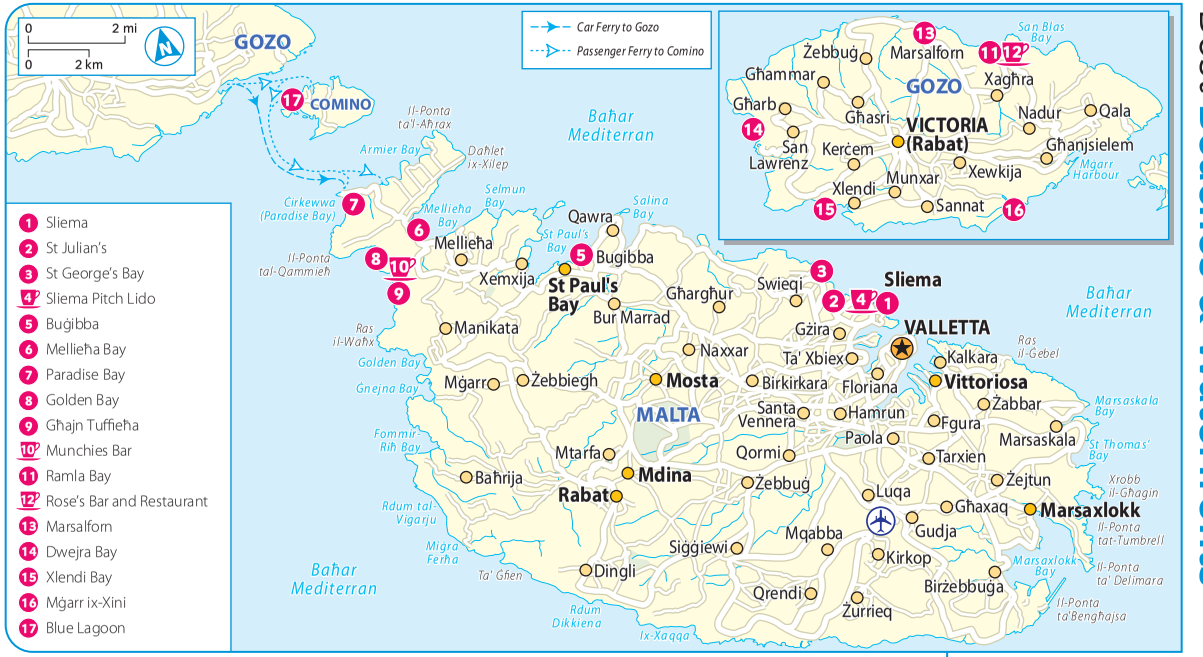
*Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum, Nadur, Gozo.*

## Relief Convoys

**Malta's position off the south coast of Italy made the island** strategically vital for Allied efforts during the Second World War. However, Italy's dominance of the Mediterranean also meant that Malta was dangerously isolated. Between 1940 and 1942, 35 major supply operations were launched by the Allies to supply Malta, however, bureaucratic incompetence and infighting between military and government officials imperilled the vital convoys. According to documents filed in the British National Archives, blame was attributed to the armed forces' trading companies whose insecure messages tipped off the Italians by leaking details of planned convoys. By August 1942, food and aviation fuel were at critically low levels in Malta and the country was close to surrender. Operation Pedestal was launched to re-supply Malta and included fourteen supply ships, including the oil tanker Ohio and protected by 44 warships including three aircraft carriers. Only three transports ended up reaching Malta under their own power, with the Ohio being towed in on August 15, the feast day of St Mary's Assumption, and later breaking up after its cargo was unloaded. The 'success' of this convoy was seen as divine intervention and once supply lines were re-established, Malta regained its prominence as the setting off point for air and naval attacks on Italy and Italian supply routes to North Africa, as well as a staging point for the invasion of Sicily and Italy. ●

# 4 The Great **Outdoors**

# Best Beaches & Waterfronts



**Malta has long attracted sun-seeking visitors to its appealing coastal communities** where the majority of tourists choose to stay. The finest sandy beaches are dotted around Malta's northern shores and the islands of Gozo and Comino, where popular seaside spots offer a wide variety of water sports, plus laid back cafés and bars. Also on hand are a number of secluded bays where the peace-loving visitor can soak up the sun in near solitude. None of Malta's beaches are tidal, but watch out for those that are exposed to north and north-easterly winds because strong undercurrents can sometimes be stirred up.

## Malta

**1/2 Sliema & St Julian's.** The stretch of waterfront that leads seamlessly from Sliema along Triq it-Torri and around Balluta Bay to St Julian's and Spinola Bay is characterised by rocky shelves at the waters edge where you can sunbathe and dip your toes into the Med. This region is where many visitors stay and, although the busy waterfront is lined with hotels, cafés and bars, it manages to maintain a firm hold on its own picturesque personality. A big bonus for swimmers and sun seekers is the string of lidos punctuating this part of the coast—some attached to hotels, others open to the public and most with adjoining cafés. **Neptunes W.P.S.C. lido** in Spinola Bay is open to non-members and the 7€ per person entry fee includes use of a sunbed and showers. At the time of writing, the **Sliema Pitch Lido** is free to use, but charges 3€ for a sunbed. For water sports in this area try Yellow Fun Watersports (☎ 2149 8829, www.yellowfunwatersports.com). Based at the Hilton and Dolmen Resort hotels, they offer everything from sausage and ringo rides to waterskiing, windsurfing and sailing. For harbour cruises, see p 83. ***Buses 62, 64, 66, 68 and 671 from Valletta or 70, 627 and 652 from Buġibba.***

**3 St George's Bay.** Characterised by upmarket hotels, St George's Bay to the north of St Julian's contains one of Malta's few sandy

*St Julian's waterfront.*

*Buġibba's waterfront.*

beaches. This small stretch of golden sand circles the head of the bay and is surrounded on all sides by resorts, bars and shops. This isn't the beach to get away from it all, but it remains a pleasant place to relax in the sand. ***Bus 66 from Valletta via Sliema and St Julian's or 70, 645 and 652 from Sliema, St Julian's and Buġibba.***

### Take a Break

4 **Sliema Pitch Lido.** One of the best restaurants attached to a lido in this region, Sliema Pitch serves up burgers, pastas, steaks and fine seafood al fresco style. ***Triq it-Torri. ☎ 2133 0134. $–$$.***

5 **Buġibba.** Of all Malta's coastal areas, the stretch of waterfront that encompasses Buġibba and neighbouring Qawra has been the most affected by the spread of bargain hotels and cheap bars and restaurants. Like Sliema and St Julian's, Buġibba's waterfront is characterised by rocky shelves and lidos, but has the added advantage of a small, fake sandy beach. In the summer months Buġibba has the reputation of being a party town, but even at this time if you wander away from its buzzing centre this region's waterfront remains a good spot for an evening stroll. **The Amazonia Lido** (☎ 2355 2410, www.amazoniamalta.com) with its two pools, sea-facing restaurant and nightclub is a lively addition to the waterfront and has a water sports company on site that organises activities including paragliding, wakeboarding and speedboat trips. ***Buses 49, 58, 59 and 159 from Valletta and 70, 645 and 652 from Sliema and St Julian's.***

6 ★★ **Mellieħa Bay.** Mellieħa Bay, with its wide, deep, often breezy sandy beach, is one of my favourite spots on Malta. Its sands are within striking distance of Mellieħa town, but it is connected by a regular bus service for those who don't want to walk. A good choice for families due to its shallow waters, Mellieħa's sands are busy with locals and visitors in high season, but there's usually still room to spread out. Expect plenty of life and amenities to take advantage of, such as cafés and takeaways and a choice of water sports including the **Adira Sailing Centre & Lido** (☎ 2152 3190, www.adirasailingcentre.com.mt) at the northern end

of the beach where you can rent a range of boards and dinghies or learn to sail (see p 83). ***Buses 43, 44, 45, 50 and 441 from Valletta and 645 from Sliema and St Julian's.***

## Marfa Peninsula Beaches

For information on the beaches dotted along the north side of the Marfa Peninsula, see Walk Two on p 75.

7 ★ **Paradise Bay.** One of the small sandy gems of Malta's beaches, Paradise Bay sits in a natural cove just south of the Gozo ferry terminal. Its sheltered waters are good for snorkelling and the small café bar serves drinks and snacks. Although secluded, Paradise Bay is popular, especially at weekends, and there's an adjoining car park for those who don't want to walk from the main road. ***Paradise Bay is 1½ km walk from the main road, and is served by public transport. Take the turning just east of the Paradise Bay Hotel. Catch any bus to the Gozo ferry terminal, which includes 43, 44 and 45 from Valletta, 645 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 48 from Buġibba.***

8 ★★ **Golden Bay &** 9 ★★ **Għajn Tuffieħa.** Two of Malta's deservedly most popular sandy beaches sit side by side on the island's north western coast. Buses terminate at Golden Bay, a deep cove of suitably golden sand dominated by the large **Radisson SAS Golden Sands Resort** (see p 104). This is one of Malta's busiest beaches, especially on Sundays in high season when a young crowd and bus loads of tourists descend. The beach is well served by a collection of café/bars and takeaways, and those who wish to dine in style can eat at one of the resort's swish restaurants. There are a multitude of water sports to choose from with **Charlie's Discovery Speedboat** (☎ 9948 6949) offering high speed boat trips around the coast; the long list of activities at **Borg Watersport** (☎ 2157 3272) includes sea sausages and crazy sofa rides plus hire of kayaks, windsurfers, pedalos and snorkelling sets. ***Buses 47 from Valletta or 652 from Sliema, St Julian's and Buġibba.***

## Take a Break

10 **Munchies Bar.** A busy pizzeria and grill tucked at the back of Golden Bay beach whose long menu includes an array of burgers, large pizzas and sandwiches. On Sundays, a chill out session with a local DJ runs from 2pm until sunset. ***Golden Bay Beach. No phone. $.***

South of Golden Bay over a small headland marked with a 17th century watch tower, lies Għajn Tuffieħa beach. The sands are accessed via a long steep flight of steps that lead from the car park of a derelict hotel that's gradually slipping down the headland to the sea. Għajn Tuffieħa is often as crowded as Golden Bay but maintains a more chilled out feel

*Għajn Tuffieħa Beach.*

than its neighbour, and a number of nature trails snake through its surrounds cliffs—see a board beside the old hotel for details of the routes. Ghajn Tuffieha's only facility is a bar/café at its northern end.

## Gozo

11 ★★★ **Ramla Bay.** Ramla Bay is a deep curve of red-gold sand and Gozo's largest and busiest beach. A white statue of the Madonna stands proud in the centre of these sheltered sands, which are lapped by a shallow sea—perfect for paddling and gentle swimming. Ramla Bay is surrounded by pretty but fragile dunes—the only ones in Malta—which are best admired from the beach rather than trampled all over. ***Bus no 42 from Victoria, July–September only. Car parking costs 1€.***

### Take a Break

12 **Rose's Bar and Restaurant.** Standing on the fringes of Ramla's sands, Rose's beachside bar, restaurant and takeaway serves a huge range of light meals on its large shaded terrace. ***Il-Bajjatar, Ramla. ☎ 2155 2235. $.***

13 **Marsalforn.** Many visitors choose to stay in this relaxed sea-facing town, whose waterfront is lined with hotels and pavement restaurants. The small sandy beach isn't the best for swimming or sunbathing and I recommend you head to the rocks to the west of the town for better opportunities for both. However, Marsalforn's waterfront is a fine place for sunset stroll, seaside lunch or evening drink. ***Bus no 21 from Victoria.***

14 **Dwejra Bay,** *see p 111, bullet 8*.

15 ★ **Xlendi Bay.** A small, sheltered pebble beach lies at the end of this protected natural harbour, fringed by waterfront cafés and hotels. Xlendi is a calm spot for both swimming and snorkelling and the collection of accommodation and mainly seafood dining options lead from the town's attractive waterfront around the surrounding harbour cliffs. **Xlendi Pleasure cruises** (☎ 2155 9967, www.xlendicruises.com) operate from the waterfront and run snorkelling trips and tours alongside canoe, row and paddle boat hire. ***Bus no 87 from Victoria.***

*Ramla Bay, Gozo.*

*Mġarr ix-Xini Harbour, Gozo.*

16 ★ **Mġarr ix-Xini.** According to legend, this sliver of a harbour was once the main base for the Knights of John's sea faring vessels. Today, its sparkling waters and tiny isolated pebble beach make for some of the best swimming and snorkelling in Malta—its deep water is also a popular dive spot. A lido, belonging to the nearby **Hotel Ta'Ċenċ** (see p 115), occupies a secluded cove here and the whole harbour is overlooked by a 17th-century watch tower. ***No public transport and very limited parking at the end of a steep road.***

## Comino

### Travel

For details of day trips to Comino see p 163, and for the Comino ferry see p 163.

17 ★★★ **Blue Lagoon.** Many visitors travel to Comino via a day trip with an organised tour company (see p 163), most of which concentrate on the supremely picture perfect Blue Lagoon. This attractive cove consists of a tiny curve of crystal white sand washed by shallow, impossibly blue seas and sheltered by surrounding headlands. The tiny Cominotto island is lodged in front of the beach and its slightly larger sands are easily reached by any decent swimmer. The Blue Lagoon heaves with visitors in high season and is served by a couple of takeaway stands selling the usual drinks, burgers and light meals. Snorkelling equipment and goggles are for rent at the nearby souvenir stall, but ultimately, if you want to experience this gorgeous spot minus the crowds, then a night at the Comino Hotel is a must.

**Comino Hotel** This large, slightly old fashioned hotel is the only accommodation on Comino, and guests can choose between rooms in the hotel itself, or holiday bungalows at the island's Santa Maria Bay. Facilities include a private sandy beach, swimming pool, tennis courts, water sports, a free regular ferry service to Malta and Gozo and space to enjoy this rugged island once all the day trippers have departed. This hotel is normally closed from the end of October to the beginning of April. ***Island of Comino. ☎ 2152 9821. www.cominohotel.com. 95 rooms, 46 bungalows. 30–68€ per person per night half board. AE, DC, MC, V.***

# Best **on Land**

COMINO
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Selmun Bay
Cirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
Mellieha Bay
Salina Bay
Qalet Marku
Qawra
Baħar Mediterran
Ras I-Irqieqa
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Mellieħa
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieh
Anchor Bay
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Paceville
St Julian's
Għargħur
Swieqi
Sliema
Bur Marrad
Manikata
Ras il-Wahx
Golden Bay
Gnejna Bay
Gżira
VALLETTA
Ras il-Gebel
Naxxar
Ta' Xbiex
Kalkara
Żebbiegh
Mosta
Birkirkara
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Mġarr
MALTA
Santa Venera
Żabbar
Marsaskala Bay
Fomm ir-Riħ Bay
Fgura
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Mtarfa
Qormi
Paola
Tarxien
Baħrija
Mdina
Rabat
Żebbuġ
Żejtun
Xrobb l-Ghagin
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Luqa
Għaxaq
Marsaxlokk
Gudja
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Migra Ferha
Siġġiewi
Mqabba
Kirkop
Marsaxlokk Bay
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Ta' Ġhen
Dingli
Birżebbuġa
Qrendi
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta' Benghajsa
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
Ghar Lapsi
Ghar Hasan
Il-Mara
0 2 mi
0 2 km
1 Il-Majjistral Nature & History Park
2 Elysium Visitor Centre
3 Golden Bay Horse Riding
4 Royal Malta Golf Club
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino

**Whatever your ability or fitness levels, land loving visitors** wanting to keep active on holiday in Malta have varied sporting options to choose from. Many of the large resorts include guest tennis or squash courts, as does the *Marsa Sports Club (Aldo Moro Street, Marsa, ☎ 2123 3851, www.marsasportsclub.com)*. Here's a taste of what else is on offer.

*Parking area for bikes in Dingli.*

## Walking

**1 Il-Majjistral Nature & History Park & 2 The Elysium Visitor Centre.** Walkers will find some of the best routes on the islands around the rugged coastal areas of Gozo and northern Malta—although don't expect much in the way of shade to ease the scorching midday summer sun. The Il-Majjistral Nature & History Park (www.majjistral.org) in north west Malta, close to Golden Bay, is a recommended place to take a ramble. The Elysium Visitor Centre, managed by the Gaia Foundation (see p 46, bullet 7), can provide information on the park. From here you can head past the Radisson SAS Golden Sands Resort and north along the coast to Rdum Majjiesa. To find out more about organised walks in the park, email to walks@majjistral.org. In addition, Nature Tours (☎ 7954 6987, www.maltanaturetours.com) lead walking tours deep into the Maltese countryside and anyone who wants to find out more about, and support initiatives to preserve, Malta's natural heritage should check out Nature Trust (www.nature trustmalta.org). Those who prefer to stay firmly on the beaten track will find Malta's towns, cities and villages excellent places to discover on foot.

## Cycling

Away from Malta's busy main roads, cycling can be an easy and enjoyable way to see the islands. Some

*Horse riding, Golden Bay.*

main thoroughfares do have cycle lanes, but on the whole it's best to keep well away from these routes and make use of the island's quieter roads. Gozo is an altogether more stress-free place to take to two wheels and with a less frequent bus service, bikes are a good way to reach all corners of this small island and not get stranded for hours. I have cycled extensively in Malta and found Joseph Montebello's *Cycle Malta and Gozo* an invaluable guide. This small booklet can be bought in shops all over the island for around 6€.

### Horse Riding

Horse riding has long been a significant part of life on Malta and an organised ride is one of the finest ways to see the islands. There are numerous riding schools to choose from including ❸ **Golden Bay Horse Riding** close to the Radisson

## Bike Hire

**Malta:**

Montary Ltd: ☎ *2182 6146 or email monte620@maltanet.net* to arrange bike hire at 10€ per day. This company also organises cycling tours of the islands to suit all tastes and abilities, either one to one or in groups of up to six.

Magri Cycles: *148b/155 Triq il-Kungress Ewkaristiku, Mosta,* ☎ *2141 4399, www.magricycles.com.* Open daily 9am–noon and 2–4pm. 8€ per day.

**Gozo:**

On Two Wheels: *36 Triq ir-Rabat, Marsalforn,* ☎ *2156 1503, www.on2wheelsgozo.com.* Open daily 8am–8pm. 8€ per day or 5.50€ per day for two days or more. Delivery and pick up available.

Victoria Garage: *Triq Putirjal, Victoria,* ☎ *2155 6414, www.victoriagaragegozo.com.* Open 8am–noon and 2pm–7pm Mon–Fri, Sat 8am–noon and 2–5pm. 5€ per day or 3.50€ per day for three days or more.

SAS Golden Sands Resort (☎ 2157 3360, www.goldenbayhorseriding.com), which opens daily and runs one and two hour rides at 18€ and 28€ per person respectively (cash only). **Bidnija Horse Riding** (☎ 2141 4010, www.bidnijahorseriding.com), located between Mosta and St Paul's Bay, also opens daily and runs one and two hour rides at 15€ and 30€ per person respectively (cash only). Details of further horse riding stables can be found at www.aboutmalta.net.

## Golf

**4 The Royal Malta Golf Club** is a private members golf club based at the Marsa Sports Club (see above). The club is open to visitors and a round of 18 holes at this par 68 course costs 60€ in low season (July, Aug and Dec) and 65€ in high season (the rest of the year). Reservations are essential. ***(☎ 2122 7019. www.royalmaltagolfclub.com).***

## Outdoor Adventure

**Malta Outdoors.** Contact the Malta Outdoors Association to find out more about adventure sports such as climbing, abseiling, trekking and kayaking on the island. ***(☎ 9942 5439, www.maltaoutdoors.com).***

*Abseiling.*

**Gozo Adventures** runs a range of outdoor activities on Gozo including climbing, abseiling, mountain biking and hiking. A half day of adventure activities costs 35€ per person and a full day is 60€ per person, including pick up/drop off anywhere in Gozo and all equipment. ***(☎ 2156 4592, www.gozoadventures.com).***

*Enjoy a round of golf.*

# Walk One: Sliema to Valletta

**This 9km walk from Sliema's waterfront to Valletta's City** Gates leads around Marsamxett Harbour and through the suburb of Floriana. Most visitors make this journey by bus; however, the 2 to 2½ hours it takes to walk it instead are an ideal way to discover the sights of this attractive pocket of Malta.

**1 Start at Sliema's ferry terminal** on Triq ix-Xatt overlooking the waters of Marsamxett Harbour. Walk south west away from Sliema along its busy, landscaped waterfront where you'll run the gauntlet of cruise tour operators touting their trips (see p 83). This wide harbour front overlooks Valletta and is one of my favourite stretches of water in Malta. There's a string of lively pavement cafés lining the opposite side of the road, any of which is a good place to pause for coffee.

**2 Manoel Island.** Follow the waterfront as it leads through the adjoining suburb of Ġzira and past Triq Forti Manoel, the road leading over the water to Manoel Island in the centre of the harbour. In the 17th century a quarantine hospital—**3 Lazzaretto di San Rocco**—was built on this tiny island in an effort to control the spread of plague and cholera from visiting ships. Once you've walked a little further around the harbour you'll be able to spy its old archways that still line the island's waterfront. Today views of Manoel Island are fringed with the masts of the many yachts moored in its boat yards and marina.

Continue walking along the waterfront past a gas station on the left hand side and at the bus stop kiosk, bear left onto a walkway that leads through a small park. Keep to the left hand path close to the waterfront and once you've past a children's play area, still keeping left, follow the pathway around the curve of Lazaretto Creek. You're now in the upmarket district of Ta'Xbiex and as you walk around Ta'Xbiex Seafront, Marsamxett Harbour opens out before you. The opposite side of the road is lined with grand mansions and the odd embassy and as you swing past Irrera restaurant the striking **4 Black Pearl,** an elegant old trading schooner moored in a dry dock, comes into view.

Follow the path along the waterfront past a marina and the Mamma Mia restaurant and you enter the

*Marsamxett Harbour.*

## The Black Pearl

The Black Pearl was built in Sweden in 1909 and is one of the last surviving wooden trading schooners. With a hull of seasoned oak, this 45m long vessel was originally called the Black Opal and legend claims in the 1950s it was the private boat of Hollywood heart throb Errol Flynn. The Black Pearl was rescued from the depths of Marsamxett Harbour in 1979 and today has new lease of life as an upmarket restaurant serving Italian style food and fresh fish. *Ta'Xbiex Seafront, ☎ 2134 3970. Mains 10–27€*. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch Mon–Fri and Sun, dinner Mon–Sat.

*The Black Pearl.*

district of Msida. Keep walking along Ix-Xatt Ta'Xbiex as it leads along the edge of Msida Creek.

### Take a Break

5 ★★ **Busy Bee.** Established in 1903, this pristine confectionary and coffee shop is a local favourite and dishes up enormous cakes and savouries alongside luscious ice cream. Closed on Mondays. ***30 Ta' Xbiex, Seafront. ☎ 2133 1738. $.***

6 **Parish Church of St Joseph.** Just past Busy Bee at the curve of Msida Creek stands the striking Parish Church of St Joseph which has two clocks on its large façade, each telling a different time. Centuries ago many Maltese churches donned two clocks—one told the right time, the other the wrong time. The purpose behind this strange custom was to confuse the devil thus ensuring he wouldn't know when mass was taking place.

Follow the road around the bottom of Msida Creek and then head towards Valletta via the district of Pieta. Walk along the shaded walkway that runs parallel with the main road, which leads into a tree lined sidewalk. When this sidewalk ends at the head of Pieta Creek you'll be faced with a large roundabout. Here you'll leave the waterfront and turn onto Triq L'Indipendenza, a wide sweeping tree lined road, signposted to Valletta. As this road curves to the left you'll be faced with 7 **Portes de Bombes**—Floriana's ornamental gates, which once formed part of Valletta's outer defensive walls.

**8 At the Lion Fountain** turn left onto Pjazza Emanuel S. Tonnes. Walk past a **9** white stone **Methodist Church** and, on the opposite side of the road, the circular **10 Sarria Church**, which was designed by Mattia Preti (see box p 33) and stands adjacent to the **11 Wignacourt Water Tower**. This tower was once part of an aqueduct system that funnelled fresh water away from Malta's hills to Valletta. Left of the tower are the entrances to the **12 Argotti Botanical Gardens** and St Philips Gardens (see p 122, bullet 4E).

Walk straight along the tree lined Triq Sarria, which on the right hand side opens out into **13 Pjazza San Publiju**, a large square at the head of which stands the **14 Church of St Publius**. The square is dotted with old stone lids that once sealed **15 underground granaries**.

The left hand side of Triq Sarria is lined by **16 Il-Mall**, tree lined gardens whose entrance is marked by Malta's **17 Independence Monument**. From the monument walk straight on to the statue of **18 Christ the King**, which stands opposite the Hotel Phoenicia (see p 126). Behind this statue is the **19 Triton Fountain** at the centre of Valletta's bus terminal and beyond that the **20 City Gates** lead into the city itself. For a tour of Valletta see p 120, and to return to Sliema catch the **21 ferry** (see p 163) from the city's waterfront to Sliema ferry terminal where this walk began.

*Independence Moment.*

*The Parish Church of St Joseph.*

# Walk Two: **Around Marfa Ridge to Mellieħa Bay**

**Jutting out from Malta's northern tip, the Marfa Ridge overlooks the Comino Channel and its bays and beaches are favourite holiday destinations for the Maltese.** Rambles in this region are prevalent in all walking books on Malta and this 10km option takes 2½–3 hours to complete and leads through rugged, quiet coastal paths and along low lying beach fronts. Other than a few bars and kiosks at Armier Bay, there are no places to take a break on this walk. So take plenty of water and be warned that there is little shade along this at times barren route. In summer, I advise you set off early in order to reach Mellieħa Bay by midday.

## Travel

Buses 45 from Valletta, 48 from Buġibba and 645 from Sliema all terminate at Ċirkewwa ferry terminal and at stops along the main road through the Marfa Ridge.

Start this walk at the 1 **Hotel Riveria,** which is located at the junction with the main road to Ċirkewwa and the minor road that leads across the north side of the Marfa Ridge—this road is marked by a sign to the Comino ferry (see p 163) and there is a bus stop at the junction. Walk past the hotel and across Hola beach, which is usually lined with sunbeds, then take the path that leads around the back of the 2 **Ramla Bay Resort** and joins the road to the hotel's entrance. Turn right away from the hotel and head east along the road as it travels along the waterfront.

Keeping to the waterfront, follow the concrete path that leads along the water's edge past a line of rough and ready boat houses on the right. Walk around 3 **Marfa,** a quiet bay lined with rambling Maltese holiday homes and take a right turn up Triq Ramlet il-Qortin. Veer left at a statue of the Virgin Mary along a minor road; you will see the abandoned 4 **White Tower** ahead on the next headland and the road is signposted towards Armier. Built in 1658 by Grand Master de Redin, the tower once served as part of Malta's coastal defence system and kept a sharp lookout for approaching pirates, but today stands derelict.

Once you've past the Victoria Bar and Restaurant on the left hand side, walk down a short flight of steps to Armier Beach. Few foreign tourists venture to this small, unpretentious bay, but it is a very popular spot with holidaying Maltese. Pass the Armier Lido and Beachcomber bars and turn right off the beach—the showers of the Beachcomber are on the right hand side—and rejoin the main road. Then, at Ray's pizzeria, turn right and walk up a narrow road identifiable by a red slow sign.

*Armier Bay.*

Turn left along a dirt track just before the statue of Sant' Anna to walk around the next small headland. Keep walking straight to pass another cluster of tiny holiday homes and follow the path as it leads down and around the waterfront. At the statue of the Madonna Berikne, follow the minor road that leads around the bay and veers to the right, with the ruined White Tower on the left.

You'll soon reach a junction with the track that heads south towards the other side of the ridge. Malta's only camping and caravan park—**5 Adventure Campsite** (☎ 2152 1105, www.maltacampsite.com)—occupies the corner of this junction. In front of its reception, the other side of a small wall, a trail snakes towards **6 Aħrax Point**—Malta's most northerly headland. Hike up the rocky trail to drink in panoramic views of Comino. A small obelisk marks this wild spot, but keep a sharp lookout for a very large hole that opens in the headland and plummets down to a sparkling lagoon carved out of the surrounding limestone cliffs. It is possible to walk to the south side of Marfa Ridge along these cliffs, but if you're not a confident walker and don't have stout shoes, then opt for the track that leads adjacent to the cliffs instead. This road is called Triw Dahlet ix-Xmajjar but is only sign posted at its southern end. Once you join the minor road that leads along the south side of the ridge, detour left to the cliffs around **7 Rdum tal-Madonna**. Some of Malta's best views can be feasted upon from this remote spot—down along the east coast of the island to Mellieħa Bay and St Paul's Bay beyond. Guarding over the cliffs is a solitary statue of the Madonna and the tiny Immaculate Conception Chapel. According to local legend, the original chapel on this spot was built as an offer of thanks to Our Lady by a local fisherman who was the sole survivor of a tragic accident at sea.

Turn back and walk straight along the road that leads through the south side of the ridge back to the junction with the main road. Badly potholed, this road is never busy with cars. The junction is marked by a small wayside shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows

*Aħrax Point.*

*Rdum tal-Madonna.*

## St Agatha's Tower—The Red Tower

**Built in 1649, this distinctive deep red tower marks one of the** Knights of St John's main defensive positions—hardly surprising as sweeping views of Malta, Gozo and Comino spread out in all directions from its roof. The tower's 4m thick walls were built to withstand siege, and food and ammunition to last 40 days were stored inside. The tower was used in both World Wars and restored by Din i-Art Ħelwa, the National Trust of Malta (see p 81) between 1999 and 2001. ☎ *2121 5222. www.dinlarthelwa.org. Admission 3€ adults, children free. Mon–Sat and first Sun of the month 10am–1pm. This property is staffed by volunteers and so call to check opening times.*

and a shop that sells drinks and snacks. At this point you can take a detour to visit 8 **St Agatha's Tower.** Also known as the Red Tower, this crimson construction is clearly visible straight ahead and reached by walking straight on at this crossroads (see boxed text below).

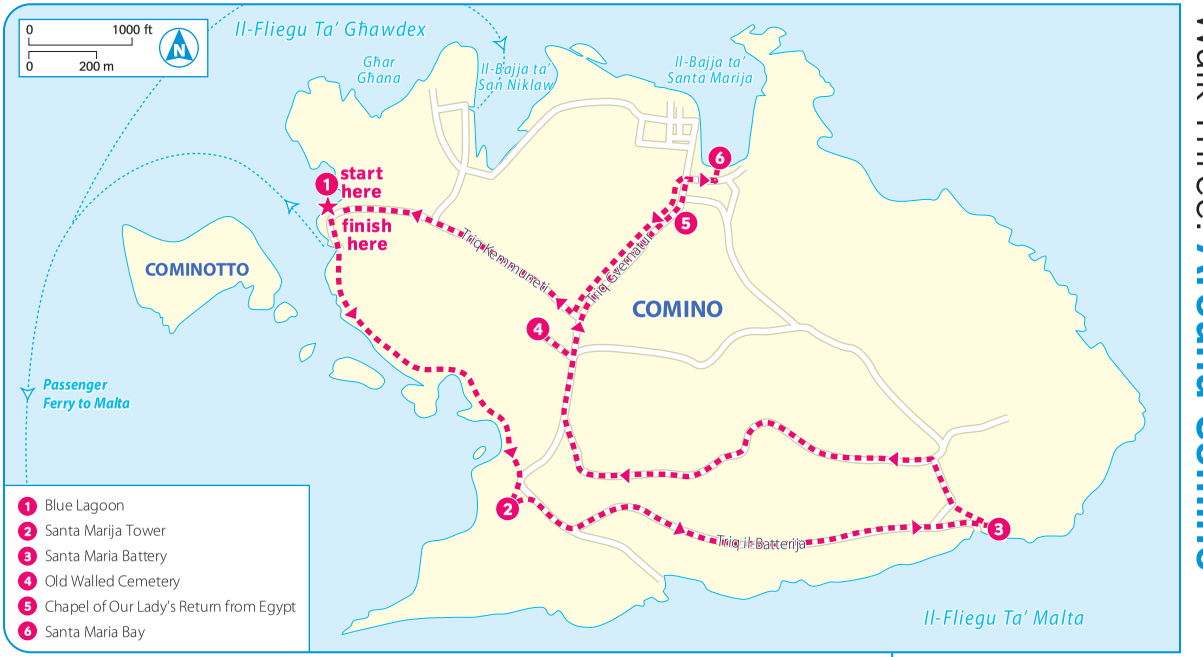
If you don't want to visit St Agatha's Tower, turn left and cross the main road to reach a flight of steps that leads across scrub land to reach Mellieħa Bay beach, where you can cool tired feet in the sea and conclude this walk with a drink or lunch at one of its beach bars. Buses back to Mellieħa, Valletta, Sliema, St Julian's and Buġibba run regularly from the stops that line the main road as it swings past the bay.

### Take a Break

9 **Costa del Sol Beach Bar.** This basic café bar at the north end of Mellieħa Bay is a good spot to refuel on pizza or bruschetta and enjoy views that take in the length of this attractive beach. ***Marfa Road, Għadira, Mellieħa.*** ☎ *2157 3135.* $.

*The Red Tower.*

# Walk Three: **Around Comino**



**The tiny island of Comino is lodged in the channel between Gozo and Malta** and named after the spice cumin that once grew here. Comino's greatest asset, busiest spot and biggest claim to fame is its beautiful Blue Lagoon—which served as the backdrop to a collection of scenes in the 2004 Hollywood blockbuster, *Troy*. Meander away from this much hyped bay to trek the network of paths that lace around this craggy island and you'll experience peace and quiet, and great walking. Wear good walking shoes for this 5½ km long walk, which leads around the island and takes around two hours to complete. There's no shade along the way and the takeaway kiosks at the Blue Lagoon and bar at the Comino Hotel are the only places to buy refreshments.

## Travel

Most visitors travel to Comino on a day trip with an organised tour (see p 163), which are often more convenient and cheaper than the ferry. However, if you want to take time on this walk, catch the Comino ferry instead (see p 163).

Start this walk at the 1 **Blue Lagoon** (see p 65, bullet 17). Most organised tours drop off here, although, those arriving by ferry will disembark at the Comino Hotel (see p 65). From here walk inland past the Comino Garden to the left and up a wide dirt track. After walking for a few minutes you'll reach a junction with another dirt track; turn right towards the views of Gozo and follow this track until it ends at the Blue Lagoon.

Strike out along the rough path that leads over the top of the headland south of the beach. A number of trails pick their way across this headland, which becomes peaceful the moment you leave the Blue Lagoon behind. As you make your way across, steep cliffs drop into turquoise waters to the right. Sailing

*Comino coastline with views of the Blue Lagoon.*

*Comino Hotel.*

ships escaping the hoards of boats on the other side of the headland usually dot these tranquil waters. Follow the path around the cliff, marked by a low stone wall to the left. If you're starting to wilt at this point, turn left onto the track that leads north across the centre of the island back towards the Comino Hotel. If, however, there's still plenty of spring left in your step, keep walking around the next headland to the imposing ❷ **Santa Marija Tower** (see boxed text below).

The tower stands adjacent to an old isolation hospital. Take the path leading to the hospital, then turn right towards the sea and stick to the path as it leads around the edge of the island. You'll spot other trails leading off, but stay on the main trail which leads to ❸ **Santa Maria Battery.** Also owned by Din i-Art Ħelwa, the National Trust of Malta (see p 81), Santa Maria is one of only three surviving gun batteries on Malta and was originally built by the Knights in the 18th century to protect these coastal straights. The semi circular gun platform supports two 11kg (24 pound) cannons and a 2.8kg (6 pound) gun, which can be viewed through the bars of an iron gate that prohibits your entry.

From the battery, double back on yourself to head uphill and inland along a scrubby trail that leads directly past an old pig farm—hold

## Santa Marija Tower

Like St Agatha's (see p 77), Santa Marija is another 17th century defensive tower built by the Knights of St John and restored by Din i-Art Ħelwa, the National Trust of Malta (see p 81). The building, also known as Wignacourt Tower after the Grand Master who constructed it, provides visitors with a rare opportunity to see inside one of these formidable structures and learn about the system of lighting warning fires that were transmitted from tower to tower. Best of all you can clamber onto the roof to take in a knight's eye view of the surrounding seas. ☎ *2121 5222. www.dinlarthelwa.org. Admission free although donations requested. Fri–Sun 9.30am–12.30pm Apr–Oct.*

## Din i-Art Ħelwa

Din i-Art Ħelwa, otherwise known as the National Trust of Malta, is a nonprofit making voluntary organisation that monitors the county's cultural heritage and natural environment. The organisation is responsible for the restoration of numerous cultural sights and looks after a fine collection of historic properties many of which are open to the public. Check out Din i-Art Ħelwa's website www.dinlarthelwa.org or call ☎ 2122 5952 for full details on these properties and related opening times, and to find out more about their programme of events such as historical re-enactments at the Red Tower (see p 77).

your nose! The path wraps around the farm before turning left away from it and leading across the top of the island. It swings back behind the hospital and joins another trail which you'll turn right onto and head towards the north side of Comino. This track leads past an 4 **old walled cemetery** sitting on a high ridge to the left. As the path forks, you can either head left back to the Blue Lagoon, or walk just a little further to reach the modest medieval 5 **Chapel of Our Lady's Return from Egypt.** Past the chapel the road opens out at 6 **Santa Maria Bay** with its small white sand beach and collection of holiday bungalows owned by the Comino Hotel (see p 65). From the bay, retrace your steps back to the crossroads and turn towards the Blue Lagoon to complete this circular walk.

*Wignacourt Tower, Comino.*

# Best **at Sea**

GOZO
COMINO
Car Ferry to Gozo
Passenger Ferry to Comino
0 2 mi
0 2 km
Il-Ponta ta'l-Ahrax
Armier Bay
Dahlet ix-Xilep
Selmun Bay
Cirkewwa (Paradise Bay)
Mellieha Bay
Salina Bay
Qalet Marku
Qawra
St Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Mellieħa
Xemxija
St Paul's Bay
Il-Ponta tal-Qammieh
Anchor Bay
Ras il-Wardija
Golden Bay
Gnejna Bay
Manikata
Bur Marrad
Gharghur
St Julian's
Swieqi
Sliema
Gzira
VALLETTA
Ras il-Gebel
Kalkara
Vittoriosa
Naxxar
Ta' Xbiex
Birkirkara
Floriana
Mosta
Mġarr
Żebbiegh
MALTA
Santa Venera
Hamrun
Fgura
Żabbar
Marsaskala Bay
Marsaskala
St Thomas' Bay
Paola
Tarxien
Fomm ir-Rih Bay
Mtarfa
Qormi
Żejtun
Xrobb il-Ghagin
Baħrija
Mdina
Rabat
Żebbuġ
Luqa
Ghaxaq
Marsaxlokk
Rdum tal-Vigarju
Mqabba
Gudja
Il-Ponta tat-Tumbrell
Migra Ferha
Siġġiewi
Kirkop
Marsaxlokk Bay
Il-Ponta ta' Delimara
Ta' Ġħen
Dingli
Birżebbuġa
Qrendi
Żurrieq
Il-Ponta ta'Benghajsa
Rdum Dikkiena
Ix-Xaqqa
Ghar Lapsi
Ghar Hasan
Il-Mara
Baħar Mediterran
Baħar Mediterran
Baħar Mediterran
San Blas Bay
Żebbuġ
Marsalforn
Ghammar
GOZO
Xagħra
Għarb
Ghasri
VICTORIA (Rabat)
Nadur
Qala
San Lawrenz
Kercem
Ghanjsielem
Munxar
Xewkija
Mgarr Harbour
Xlendi
Sannat
Xlendi Bay
Mgarr ix-Xini Bay
1 Rozi
2 HMS Maori
3 Carolita Barge
4 Wied iż-Żurrieq
5 Dwejra
6 Lantern Point

**The waters surrounding Malta's 200km of coastline are clear,** rich with marine life and, with an average temperate of above 20°C from June to October, pleasantly warm. No visit is complete without experiencing these waters first hand and the choice of opportunities ranges from gentle boats trips to professional diving. Information on water sports operators is included with the details on the beach where they are located. See below for a taste of what else is on offer.

## Snorkelling

Snorkelling equipment can be bought in many tourist shops or rented from most water sports operators. The best spots to peer beneath the sea are Comino's Blue Lagoon and Santa Marija Bay and, on Gozo, the waters around Xwieni Bay near Marsalforn.

## Sailing

Malta is an important centre for sailing and has several marinas. If you want to try your hand, contact the **Adira Sailing Centre & Lido** (☎ 2152 3190, www.adirasailing centre.com.mt) who are located at Mellieħa Bay and operate a sailing school.

## Sea Kayaking

See Malta Outdoor and Gozo Adventures on p 69.

## Cruises

The gentlest way to take to the Maltese waters is via an organised tour. Numerous operators run a variety of regular excursions, the most popular of which is a jaunt around the harbours surrounding Valletta, Vittoriosa and Sliema. Longer tours include full day sailings around Malta, trips to Comino and sunset cruises. The waterfront area around Sliema's ferry terminal is lined with cruise tour operators all touting their trips. The larger companies include: **Hera Cruises** (☎ 2133 0583, www.herayachtmalta.com), **Captain Morgan Cruises** (☎ 2134 1270, www.captainmorgan.com.mt) and **Alliance Cruises & Tours** (☎ 2133 2165, www.alliancecruises.com).

*A cruise around the Grand Harbour and past Fort St Angelo, Vittoriosa.*

## Diving

According to local legend, Malta is a strong contender for Plato's lost city of Atlantis. It comes as no surprise therefore that the islands' underwater landscapes contain some of the best dive sites in Europe. And there's no shortage of dive shops offering all abilities, from the complete beginner to the experienced diver, the opportunity to explore these intriguing aquatic realms. Make sure you have adequate travel insurance if you wish to dive and act responsibly underwater in order to preserve this delicate environment. So never touch living marine organisms, feed fish, break off shells or coral as souvenirs or disturb marine animals such as sea turtles.

# Diving Information

To find out more about diving in Malta we recommend Peter Lemon's *Scuba Diving: Malta, Gozo, Comino* and *A Guide to Shore Diving: The Maltese Islands*. Also browse www.locationmalta.com/theme/diving for detailed information on the best sites.

## Best Dive Sites

**1 The harbour tug Rozi.** Malta's waters contain an inviting range of dive sites which include WWII wrecks, naturally formed caves and colourful reefs. Some of Malta's most popular sites include the harbour tug Rozi which rests upright off the Marfa Peninsula and is populated with hoards of dazzling fish.

**2 HMS Maori and 3 the Carolita Barge**, both WWII casualties lying in the depths of Marsamxett Harbour (see p 56).

**4 Wied iż-Żurrieq** (Blue Grotto) which features underwater caves and the wreck of tanker *Um El Faroud*.

**5 Dwejra in Gozo** where divers can explore the tunnel leading to the Inland Sea (see p 111), the underwater scenery surrounding Fungus Rock and the famous Blue Hole with its near vertical wall.

**6 Lantern Point** in the south west of Comino, which features a dramatic underwater cliff.

## Dive Shops

Malta contains dozens of dive shops. Make sure the one you choose is a member of PADI (Professional Diving Schools Association), because this organisation ensures professional standards are adhered to. For a full list of qualified instructors on the island check the website of Malta's Professional Diving Schools Association: www.pdsa.org.mt.

### Malta

**Dive Shack,** *14a Qui-si-sana Seafront, Sliema, ☎ 2132 0594, www.divemalta.com.*

**Divewise,** *Westin Dragonara Complex, St Julian's, ☎ 2135 6441, www.divewise.com.mt.*

**Maltaqua,** *Mosta Road, St Paul's Bay, ☎ 2157 1873, www.maltaqua.com.*

**Paradise Diving,** *Paradise Bay Hotel, Ċirkewwa, ☎ 2157 4116, www.paradisediving.com.*

### Gozo

**Gozo Aqua Sports,** *Triq ir-Rabat, Marsalforn, ☎ 2156 3037, www.gozoaquasports.com.*

**Moby Dives,** *Xlendi Bay, ☎ 2156 4429, www.mobydivesgozo.com.*

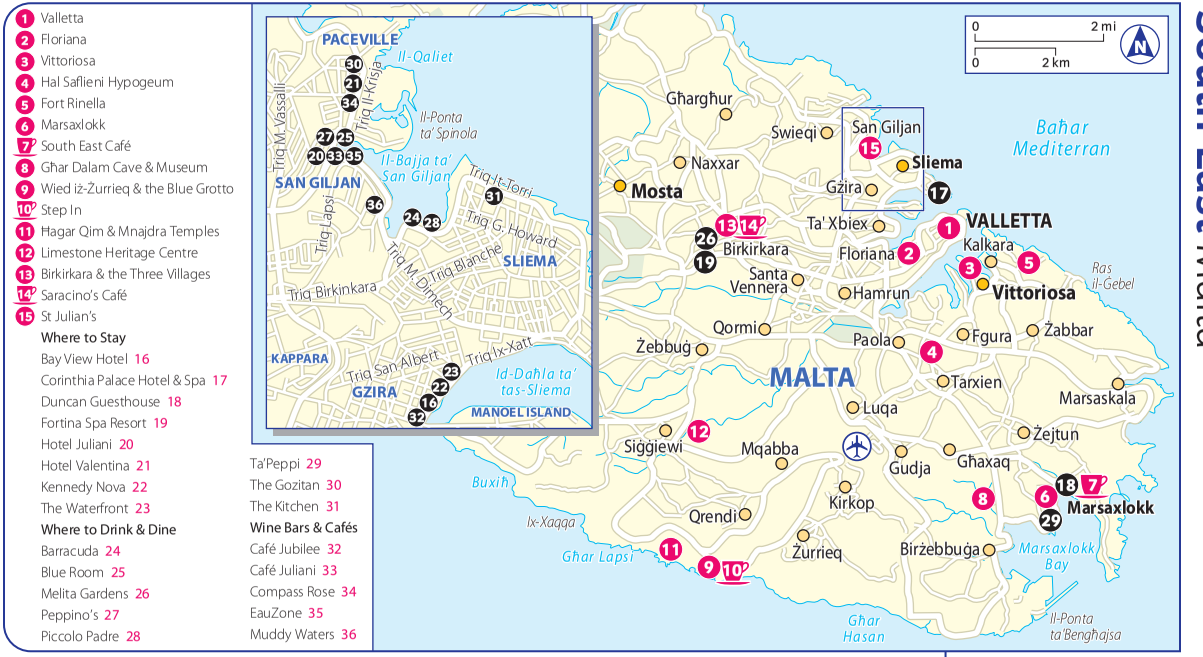
**Scuba Kings,** *46A Triq Marina, Marsalforn, ☎ 9923 0788, www.divemalta-gozo.com.*

### Comino

**Comino Dive Centre,** *Comino Island, ☎ 2157 0354, www.cominodivecentre.com.*

# 5 The Best **Regional Tours**

# South East Malta




1. Valletta
2. Floriana
3. Vittoriosa
4. Hal Saflieni Hypogeum
5. Fort Rinella
6. Marsaxlokk
7. South East Café
8. Għar Dalam Cave & Museum
9. Wied iż-Żurrieq & the Blue Grotto
10. Step In
11. Ħagar Qim & Mnajdra Temples
12. Limestone Heritage Centre
13. Birkirkara & the Three Villages
14. Saracino's Café
15. St Julian's

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**Malta's south east is the place to discover the best of the** country's absorbing history. Here the ancient cities of Vittoriosa and Valletta rub shoulders over the Grand Harbour with the latter running almost seamlessly into medieval communities such as the Three Villages. This region is also home to Malta's finest megalithic temples and World Heritage sites plus some of Malta's best museums. And what the south east's coastline lacks in beaches, it makes up for with its well used waterfronts where you can join the locals and stroll, sample fresh seafood and simply watch Maltese harbour life going about its timeless business.

**1 Valletta.** This tour starts in Malta's capital city Valletta. The island's main bus terminus (see p 161) is located just outside the City Gate. For a detailed tour of Valletta see p 120.

**2 Floriana.** From Valletta strike south west to explore the elegant suburb of Floriana, which merges seamlessly with the city and is a five minute walk away. Built in the 18th century, this working community with its wide roads is a refreshing alternative to Valletta's narrow Baroque ridden streets. From Valletta's bus terminus head south east along Triq Nelson to reach Triq Sant'Anna, the main route through Floriana, and walk along this busy road until you reach the Lion Fountain. At this point follow the last section of Walk One on p 70 back through Floriana and its sights to the bus terminus.

*Valletta Bus Station.*

**3 Vittoriosa.** Head over to the south east shores of the Grand Harbour to the ancient town of Vittoriosa and the so called Three Cities, to continue this tour. Once you've taken in its intimate, old streets and historic sites, cross Dockyard Creek to Senglea, the second of the Three Cities on the opposite peninsula. See p 130 for a tour of both these communities. ***Bus 1, 2, 4 or 6 from Valletta and 627 from Sliema and Buġibba to Vittoriosa's small bus terminal.***

**4 Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.** Weave your way south east through Paola to the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, Malta's finest ancient site (see p 28, bullet 3). From the Hypogeum it's a short walk to the **Tarxien Temples** another highlight of the island's World Heritage megalithic monuments (see p 29, bullet 4). ***Bus 1 from Vittoriosa and Valletta, 11 from Valletta and 427 from Buġibba; all stop at Paola.***

**5 ★★ Fort Rinella.** View the world's largest cannon, a whopping 100-tonne gun, whose 10½ m long muzzle can fire a 1 tonne shell up to

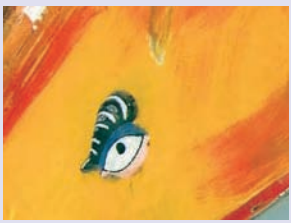
*Colourful boats in Marsaxlokk Harbour.*

13km. The fort and its famous gun were built by the British in 1878 to protect the eastern flank of the Grand Harbour and tours lead through its battery, underground chambers and galleries. Every afternoon at 2.30pm, for an extra fee, you can hook into an animated tour, which commences with the firing of a Victorian cannon and brings history to life through re-enactments. *1 hr. Triq Santu Rokku, Kalkara. ☎ 2180 0992. www.wirtartna.org. Admission 8€ adults, 7€ children, animated tours an extra 5€ each. Daily 9.30am–5pm. Bus 4 from Valletta via Vittoriosa. The closest bus stop is a 10 minute walk from the fort.*

6 ★ **Marsaxlokk** is an old Maltese fishing village sprawled around a wide, pretty harbour whose waters are crammed with colourful traditional fishing boats. Here you can fill your lungs with Mediterranean sea air while taking a slow walk around this old hard-working waterfront, where a large percentage of Malta's fishing fleet dock and lace tablecloths billow out from a line of market stalls selling traditional Maltese crafts and other tourist fare. Plan to visit around midday as the trail of seafood restaurants lining the harbour road are recommended places to lunch on the catch of the day. Those who

## The Eye of Osiris

Malta's distinctive boldly coloured fishing boats are known as luzzu and many sport a pair of decorative eyes painted onto their bows. Known as the Eye of Osiris, the Phoenicians are thought to have introduced the tradition of painting them onto Maltese fishing boats in the belief that they would ward off evil spirits.



*The Eye of Osiris.*

choose to stay overnight will sample a small peaceful pocket of authentic Malta, but although all is tranquil today, in 1565 the invading Turkish fleet landed in the wide Marsaxlokk Bay and the Great Siege began. ***Bus 27 from Valletta, 627 from Buġibba, St Julian's and Sliema.***

### Take a Break

7 ★★ **South East Café.** Chic and friendly and with free WiFi, South East is off the main waterfront and buzzing with local business types. I love the coffee and shakes and the menu that includes pizzas, platters, ciabattas and fresh seafood. ***Triq il-Wilga, Marsaxlokk. ☎ 99462755. $.***

8 **Għar Dalam Cave & Museum.** It was in this long, narrow subterranean cavern, whose name means 'cave of darkness', that evidence of the first human settlement on Malta was discovered. Finds date back nearly 7,500 years and the adjoining museum displays many of the hundreds of animal bones, such as dwarf elephants and baby hippopotamuses, and human artefacts, that have been uncovered here. Remarkably the cave has also served as an air raid shelter and fuel storage depot during WWII, however, despite its long history, this attraction is only of real interest enthusiasts. ***30 min. Triq Iż-Żejtun, 500m north of Birżebbuga. ☎ 2165 7419. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 3.49€ adults, 1.16€ children. Daily 9am–5pm. Bus 11 from Valletta.***

9 ★★★ **Wied iż-Żurrieq & the Blue Grotto.** A steep windy road leads from the village of Żurrieq down to the sea at the tiny, picture perfect harbour of Wied iż-Żurrieq where boat trips to the striking Blue Grotto depart. This is regular stop on any island tour and comes with

*South East Café.*

the usual souvenir shops and tourist cafés. However, the minute you hop aboard a small traditional Maltese boat and enter the grotto through an immense arch and into a stunning 42m high cave, you'll see what all the fuss is about. Crystal white sand lining the sea bed reflects sunlight and turns the waters a sparkling blue. Trips pass through a string of natural caves, all created by the persistent pummelling of waves along this jagged coastline. ***30 min. Aim for an early trip to miss the crowds and catch the morning sunlight pouring into the grotto from the west. Boats depart from the boat house at the head of the inlet—just follow the road through the village. 9€ per person. Daily 9am–4pm, weather permitting. Buses 138 and 38 from Valletta, which continue onto Ħaġar Qim and Mnajdra Temples, see bullet 9.***

### Take a Break

10 **Step In.** The outside terrace of this basic café and pizzeria overlooks the tiny inlet where boat trips to the grotto depart. Pizza, pasta and light meals can be lingered over along with the fascinating view. ***Wied iż-Żurrieq. ☎ 2168 3104. $.***

*The Blue Grotto.*

⓫ ★★ West along Malta's craggy south coast stands the haunting **Ħaġar Qim & Mnajdra Temples,** *see p 29, bullet* ⑥.

⓬ **Limestone Heritage Centre.** From the megalithic temples aim north to the village Siġà ġiewi and the Limestone Heritage Centre on its eastern outskirts, to find out all about the rock they're built from. Limestone makes up Malta's temples, churches, buildings and defensive walls and at this attraction you can follow the history of this distinctive honey-coloured rock from the moment the Maltese Archipelago was created millions of years ago, to its modern usage. *1 hr. Mons. Mikiel Azzopardi Street, Siġġiewi. ☎ 2146 4931. www.limestoneheritage.com. Admission 5.83€ adults, 2.33 € children. Mon–Fri 9am–3pm, Sat 9am–noon, Sun 8.30–11.30am. Bus 89 from Valletta.*

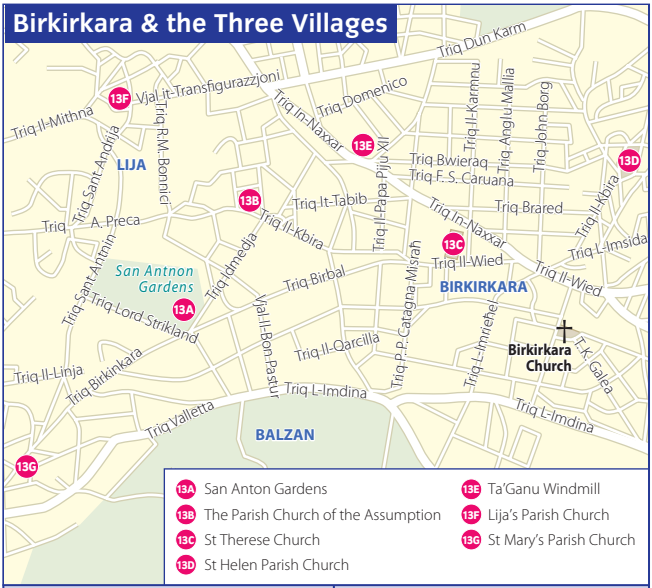
⓭ **Birkirkara & the Three Villages.** Birkirkara and the so called Three Villages of Attard, Balzan and Lija merge seamlessly into one another to create a large, historic residential region directly west of Valletta. This mini tour includes some of Malta's incredible parish churches and a taste of some of its fine medieval communities. For details on the best times to visit churches in Malta see p 39 and for a more detailed walk round this region ask for leaflet entitled *A Tour of Birkirkara, Balzan, Attard and Lija* from Tourist Information ***(see p 166)***. ***Bus 40 from Valletta travels to all these communities.***

*The Parish Church of the Assumption, Balzan.*

## Where to Shop

After Valletta, Sliema is the prime destination for chain stores and mainstream shopping in this region of Malta. Traditional Maltese crafts, along with fresh fish from the fishing fleet, can be picked up at the market on Marsaxlokk's waterfront. For shopping in Valletta, see p 125.

## Birkirkara & the Three Villages




**A** ★★ **San Anton Gardens**, *see p 45, bullet* 2.

**B** ★ **The Parish Church of the Assumption.** The entrance to Balzan's grand parish church is guarded by two dramatic statues of Our Lady and the Archangel Gabriel. Behind its Spanish influenced façade lies a feast of ornate decoration and a fine collection of paintings by various Maltese artists.

**C** ★★ **St Therese Church.** A startling and stunning modern addition to the Three Village's churches, the round St Therese has an unusually plain interior, which maintains a hint of gothic and is dominated by an unusual angel-strewn alter.

**D** ★★★ **St Helen Parish Church** is one of the most outstanding examples of the Baroque on Malta. This grand place of worship boasts the largest bell on the island and its lavish interior is graced by many grand works of Maltese art.

**E** **Ta'Ganu Windmill** is, after the churches, one of the oldest buildings in this region—it dates back to the early 18th century—and houses an art gallery that exhibits local and international work.

**F** **Lija's Parish Church.** At the end of the wide, tree-lined Vjal it-Transfigurazzjoni, which froths with pink and white blossom in spring, stands Lija's Parish Church. The main altarpiece was created by Mattia Preti (see p 33) and the church contains eight other altars all decorated with their own individual artwork.

**G** **St Mary's Parish Church** in Attard has been altered and added to over the centuries and as such displays numerous architectural styles. As with the region's other churches, its interior is dripping with the work of local artists, but also look for the delightful statues of saints in the chancel.

# Filfla Island

**The tiny islet of Filfla rises steeply from the sea like a rugged** soufflé 5km off Malta's south coast. Filfla marks the most southerly point of the Maltese Archipelago and its sharp cliffs rise to nearly 60m.

Apart from a chapel built inside a cave in the 14th century and destroyed by an earthquake 500 years later, no building has ever been constructed on the island. Under British rule Filfla was used as target practice by the armed forces, but today it is a protected sea bird colony and no visitors are allowed onto its shores without government permission.

*Filfla Island from Dingli Cliffs.*

## Take a Break

14 ★ **Saracino's Café.** Soak up a peaceful ambiance while lingering over coffee and local pastries on a shaded terrace overlooking St Mary's Parish Church. Light meals including pizza and pasta are also on the menu. *Pjazza Tal-Knisja.* ☎ *2142 2995.* $.

*Ballutta building, St Julian's.*

15 **St Julian's.** From the Three Villages, head north to hit Malta's coast again at St Julian's to view its distinguished **Balluta Buildings** (see p 37, bullet 13), and fun **LOVE Sculpture** (see p 37, bullet 14). Head along Triq it-Torri and St Julian's waterfront (see p 61, bullet 2) as it leads into the district of Sliema. Cut through the centre of Sliema and past its many shops to emerge on this district's other waterfront, which trails around the edge of Marsamxett Harbour (see the start of Walk One on p 70). This is my favourite place for a evening stroll because you can watch the domes of Valletta's churches on the opposite side of the harbour, where this tour began, melt into a mellow gold in the light of the setting sun.

# Where to **Stay**

*Bay View Hotel, Sliema.*

## Valletta

See p 126 for accommodation options in Valletta.

## Sliema

**★ Bay View Hotel** One of Sliema's solid 3 star hotels, Bay View has a great location overlooking Marsamxett Harbour and it's worth paying extra for a room with a waterfront view. Facilities include roof top and indoor (small) pools, a fitness room and sauna, plus guest bars and restaurants. *143 The Strand. ☎ 2134 6212. www.bayviewmalta.com. 240 rooms. 30–115€ per room w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

**★★ Fortina Spa Resort** Occupying the exclusive and quiet end of Sliema's waterfront, Fortina, with its large rooms, four spas, numerous pools and fitness room, is well equipped to provide exclusive luxury. *Tigné Seafront. ☎ 2346 0000. www.hotelfortina.com. 300 rooms. 104–145€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

**★★ Kennedy Nova** One of the finest of the line of hotels facing this popular waterfront, Kennedy Nova features a mini gym, spa and sauna, and sweeping views of Marsamxett Harbour from its roof top pool and bar. *116 The Strand. ☎ 2134 5480. www.kennedynova.com. 98 rooms. 56–104€ per room w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

*Fortina Spa Resort, Sliema.*

★★ **The Waterfront** I found this four star, modern hotel to be pleasant and friendly and liked its convenient location. Take in the sights from its glass fronted lobby bar or swish roof top bar and enjoy the added extras of a guest lounge, swimming pool and private parking. *The Strand. ☎ 2133 3434. www.waterfronthotelmalta.com. 116 rooms. 103–141€ per double room w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

## St Julian's & Paceville

★★★ **Hotel Juliani** A fabulous contemporary boutique hotel overlooking St Julian's Bay. The deluxe rooms, leisure facilities, chic restaurants and laid back ambience all complement the aura of tradition infused into this lovely old building. *12 Triq San Ġorġ. ☎ 2138 8000. www.hoteljuliani.com. 33 rooms, 11 suites. 140–195€ per room per night. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★ **Hotel Valentina** A stylish and surprising budget option in the midst of a busy tourist region—although the hotel is on a quiet side street.

*Duncan Guesthouse, Marsaxlokk.*

*Hotel Juliani overlooks St Julian's Bay.*

Decent rooms come with the usual mod cons including air conditioning. *Triq Schreiber. ☎ 2138 2232. www.hotelvalentina.com. 30 rooms. 23–49€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

## Elsewhere in the South East

★★★ **Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa** One of my favourite hotels in Malta, the secluded Corinthia is set in landscaped gardens and oozes tranquility. Far removed from any tourist hot spot and well equipped with all the facilities you'd expect, this five star hotel combines luxury with relaxed friendly service. *Vjal de Paule, Attard. ☎ 2144 0301. www.corinthiahotels.com. 153 rooms. 148–236€ per room per night—check the website for cheaper deals. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★★ **Duncan Guesthouse** This family run traditional guesthouse right on Marsaxlokk's waterfront is warm, inviting and value for money. The large, spotless rooms each come with a lounge area and balcony and added extras include a good restaurant and bar on site. *33 Xatt is-Sajjieda. ☎ 2165 7212. http://duncanmalta.com. 10 rooms. 34–45€ per room per night. AE, MC, V.*

# Where to **Drink & Dine**

## Valletta

For drinking and dining options in Valletta see p 127 and in Vittoriosa see p 135; for nightlife in Valletta see p 129.

## Sliema

★★ **Barracuda** *MEDITERRANEAN*
Located in an old prominent waterfront villa, Barracuda is an elegant, if slightly formal, restaurant and one of the most upmarket dining options in this area. Both the sea views and mainly Italian cuisine are excellent. ***195 Triq il-Kbira. ☎ 2133 1817. Mains 9–43€. AE, DC, MC, V. Dinner daily.***

★★ **Café Jubilee** *WINE BAR/CAFÉ*
With a sign outside declaring 'wine is bottled poetry come read with us', Café Jubilee is an inviting, eccentric bistro where you can chill out over fine wine, good coffee, tasty snacks and sometimes local music. ***209 Triq ix-Xatt. ☎ 2133 7141. DC, MC, V. Daily breakfast, lunch and dinner.***

★★ **The Kitchen** *MEDITERRANEAN*
The location might be uninspiring, but the food is first class. Expect contemporary Mediterranean cuisine with flare and options for vegetarians from an award-winning chef, all served in minimalist surroundings. ***210 Triq it-Torrie. ☎ 2131 1112. Mains 8–21€. DC, MC, V. Lunch Wed–Sun, dinner daily.***

★★ kids **Piccolo Padre** *ITALIAN*
Dine on reasonably priced pizza and pasta at this charming, rustic cellar restaurant perched on the edge of the waterfront. This is a great family option and provides a decent children's menu. ***195 Triq il-Kbira. ☎ 2134 4875. Mains 7–14€. AE, DC, MC, V. Dinner daily.***

## St Julian's

A stack of buzzing eateries all offering similar Italian and Mediterranean dishes line St Julian's waterfront and Triq- Paceville; below are a sample

*Café Jubilee, Sliema.*

*Café Juliani.*

of the other restaurants which stand out for me.

★★ **Blue Room** *CHINESE* A welcome relief from the plethora of Mediterranean restaurants, Blue Room is a chic, upmarket and friendly Chinese option. The food is first class and the location on the first storey an escape from the busy streets below. ***151 Triq San Ġorġ. ☎ 2138 4784. Mains 7–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch Sat and Sun, dinner daily.***

★ **Café Juliani** *WINE BAR/CAFÉ* Sink into a comfy armchair and be relaxed by soft jazz at this stylish café inside the swish Hotel Juliani. A range of light meals are served alongside a selection of teas, coffees and alcoholic drinks. ***12 Triq San Ġorġ. ☎ 2183 8000. Mains 5–9€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

**Compass Rose** *CREPERIE* Small and friendly, Compass Rose serves a large range of sweet and savoury crepes. Also good for English breakfasts and late night sangria. ***3 Triq Paceville. ☎ 9928 1956. Crepes 3–6€. No credit cards. Daily from 10am until late.***

**EauZone** *WINE BAR* This stylish bar inside Hotel Juliani is the place to sink a cocktail while enjoying wide views over Spinola Bay. There's even sushi on the side if you get the nibbles. ***12 Triq San Ġorġ. ☎ 2183 8000.***

★★ **The Gozitan** *MALTESE* This colourful, friendly restaurant is close to the heart Paceville's brash nightlife yet one step removed from its noisy bustle. Dedicated to serving Gozo food cooked the traditional way, the menu is heavy with rabbit and lamb dishes and the Gozo

## Takeaway

Located at the Bay View Hotel on Sliema's waterfront the China Village and Bombay Palace restaurants provide their long menus of Chinese and Indian foods, which include a good range of vegetarian options, as takeaway as well as eat in—prices are the same for both. *Open daily for lunch and dinner. ☎ 2132 0216 for both restaurants. Mains 5–15€.* DC, MC, V.

## Nightlife

**Paceville is Malta's nightclub and late night bar capital.** The highest concentration of nightlife can be found at the north ends of Triq Paceville and Triq San Ġorġ and along the narrow pedestrian Triq Santu Widtin, which is lined on both sides with bars and clubs. The names and scenes are constantly changing, but at the time of writing Plush on Triq Santu Widtin is the place to lounge on deep sofa chairs to enjoy a hookah smoke; Havana on Triq San Ġorġ and Fuego on Triq Santu Wistin are popular clubs with both locals and tourists.

cheeses are not to be missed. ***Triq Paceville. ☎ 2786 4626. Mains 10–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch and dinner daily.***

★ **Muddy Waters** *BAR* Popular with locals and a young crowd, Muddy Waters, or Muddies, is packed at weekends when there's often live music, but quieter during the week. ***56 Triq il-Kbira. ☎ 2137 4155. Open every evening—closing times vary.***

★ **Peppino's** *MEDITERRANEAN* Well frequented by celebrities visiting Malta, the multi-levelled Peppino's serves up an excellent range of mainly Italian and French cuisine along with superb views of Spinola Bay. ***31 Triq San Ġorġ. ☎ 2133 7036. Mains 8–18€. AE, DC. MC, V. Lunch and dinner Mon–Sat.***

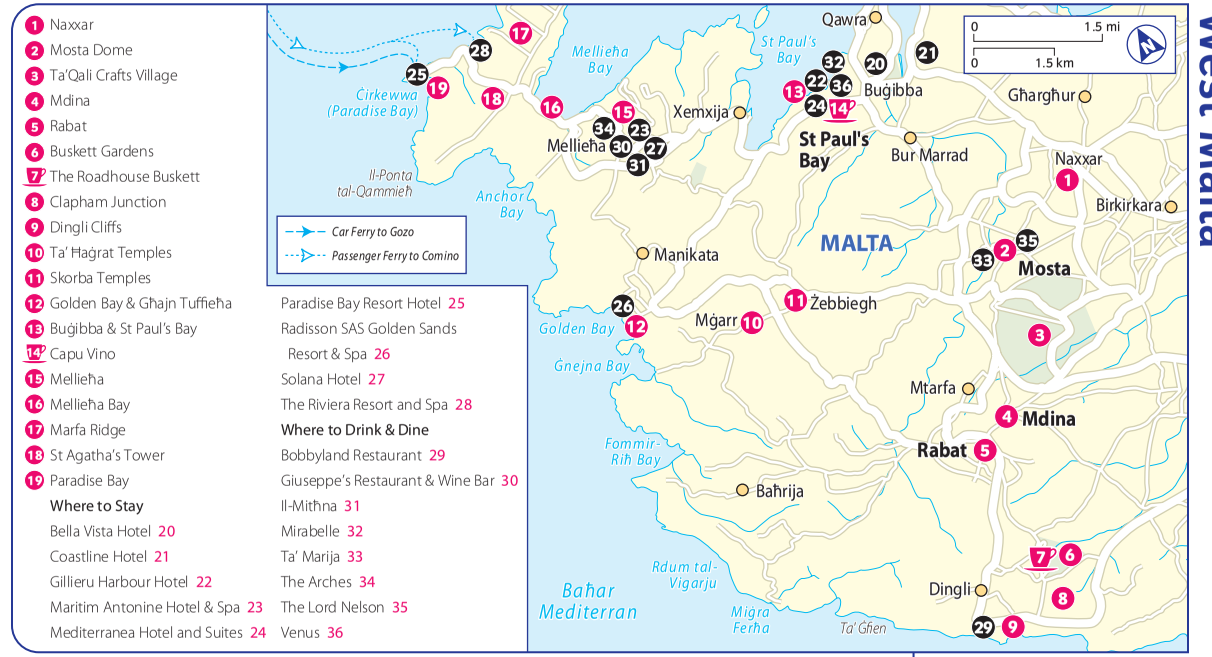
### Elsewhere in the South East

★★ **Melita Gardens** *PIZZERIA/MEDITERRANEAN/WINE BAR* By day enjoy the elegant café and at night dine in a fine restaurant at this old world style complex that backs onto San Anton Gardens and features a striking glass atrium that covers a rustic terrace. ***Triq I-Idmejda, Attard. ☎ 2147 0064. Mains 5–18€. AE, MC, V. Café daily lunch and dinner, restaurant dinner only.***

★ **Ta'Peppi** *SEAFOOD* Experience melt-in-the-mouth fresh seafood in the heart of Marsaxlokk's Harbour at this small but smart waterfront restaurant. The menu also features pasta and grills and all dishes are cooked to perfection. ***78 Xatt is-Sajjieda, Marsaxlokk. ☎ 2165 0664. 6–10€. MC, V. Open daily lunch and dinner.***

*Muddy Waters, St Julian's.*

# The Best of **Central & North West Malta**




1. Naxxar
2. Mosta Dome
3. Ta'Qali Crafts Village
4. Mdina
5. Rabat
6. Buskett Gardens
7. The Roadhouse Buskett
8. Clapham Junction
9. Dingli Cliffs
10. Ta' Ħaġrat Temples
11. Skorba Temples
12. Golden Bay & Għajn Tuffieħa
13. Buġibba & St Paul's Bay
14. Capu Vino
15. Mellieħa
16. Mellieħa Bay
17. Marfa Ridge
18. St Agatha's Tower
19. Paradise Bay

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- Il-Mitħna 31
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**Central Malta is characterised by a string of ancient communities** that flow into each other along the spine of the island. Although busy with visitors, few choose to stay here so this region provides a delightful taste of authentic Malta and the opportunity to get under the skin of its medieval history. Malta's best beaches blossom in the north of the island where many sun-seeking visitors opt to stay. This is also the preferred end of the island for anyone seeking to experience all that Malta's outdoors has to offer—both on land and in the water. The population thins out dramatically in this region and you'll find room to breathe, walk, take in the views and visit some unexpected attractions—old and new. This tour starts by taking in the towns of central Malta before heading to the beaches and coastal communities in the north.

**1 Start this tour in the old town of Naxxar** where local legend claims that St Paul preached soon after being shipwrecked on Malta—the town's Latin motto *Prior Credidi* means 'first to believe'. Naxxar's highlight is its stunning ★★★ **Palazzo Parisio** (see p 36, bullet 12). Opposite the palazzo stands the town's parish church, which is dedicated to Our Lady and was built in the early 17th century. The church sports a large Baroque façade and, of the many paintings inside, the main one depicts the Birth of Our Lady and is believed to have been created by the school of Mattia Preti (see boxed text p 33). Also look out for an antique painting on wood that hangs in the sacristy. This unusual work was created in 1595 and depicts Our Lady of the Rosary. ***Bus 55 or 56 from Valletta and 65 from Sliema and St Julian's.***

*Church of Our Lady, Naxxar.*

Naxxar merges seamlessly south west into the busy town of Mosta. The main stop here is **2** ★★★ **Mosta Dome**, see p 41, bullet 6. ***The numerous buses to Mosta from Valletta include 47, 49, 52 and 58, 65 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 86 from Buġibba.***

**3 The Ta'Qali Crafts Village** on the eastern outskirts of Mdina is a popular shopping destination for visitors wanting to buy local arts and crafts (see boxed text below). Located a few minutes walk from the village is **Malta's Aviation Museum** (see p 56, bullet 6).

**4 Mdina** Keep aiming south west through central Malta to reach the walled city of Mdina, where medieval simplicity meets Baroque extravagance in a clash of architectural styles that somehow manage to complement each other. The city occupies a high ridge on the island's flat central plain and its imposing defensive wall is clearly visibly for miles around. For

*Ta'Qali Crafts Village.*

a detailed tour of this city, see p 136. To reach Mdina, catch bus 80 or 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema or 86 from Buġibba to the bus terminal just south of Rabat's Howard Gardens; from here it takes a couple of minutes to walk to Mdina's Main Gate.

5 **The town of Rabat** spreads out to the south of Mdina and is connected to the older neighbouring city by a long historical umbilical cord. For a detailed tour of Rabat see p 142 and to visit the city by public transport, catch bus 80 or 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema or 86 Buġibba to the terminal to the south of the city's Howard Gardens.

6 ★★ **Buskett Gardens.** If you're feeling energetic, a half hour walk south from Rabat along a fairly quiet road takes you to ★★ Buskett Gardens (see p 45, bullet 6); otherwise catch bus 81 which regularly runs from Valletta via Rabat.

## Where to Shop

**The Ta'Qali Crafts Village (www.taqali.com) to the east of Mdina** stands on a former WWII airfield and consists of a collection of arts and crafts workshops housed in old Nissen huts. Despite being a bit tatty, this is one of the most popular tourist shopping places in Malta and it's worth travelling here if you're interested in local crafts. Highlights include the Phoenician Glassblowers (www.phoenicianglass.com) where you can watch glass being hand-blown. Buses 80 and 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema and 86 from Buġibba all stop at Ta'Qali. For local wines in this region pay a visit to the Master Cellars *(Naxxar, ☎ 2141 7666, www.mastercellars.com.mt)*. This fabulous wine shop sells the pick of local, and a vast array of international, wine. For details of shopping in Rabat see p 146.

## Malta in the Movies

**Film crews are a common sight in Mdina—I came across a section** of the city's lanes being converted into an elaborate film set during my last visit. A large number of movies have used locations in Malta and wherever you are on any of the islands you're never far away from one of them. Big budget films in recent years that have shot on location in Malta include *Troy* (see the walk around Comino on p 78) and *Gladiator*—actor Oliver Reed's last night out was drinking in Valletta's *The Pub* on Triq i-Arċisqof while filming his final movie. Blockbuster *The Da Vinci Code* also used locations in Malta as did Steven Spielberg's *Munich*, while Valletta's Fort St Elmo has formed the backdrop for various scenes in films such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Midnight Express*.

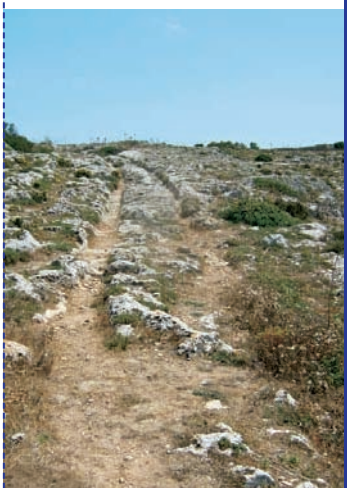
### Take a Break

**7 ★ The Roadhouse Buskett.** The outdoor terrace of this large restaurant in the heart of Buskett Gardens is the place to lunch in an oasis of tranquility. Options include pasta, sandwiches, burgers and platters all of which can be complemented by a cold pint of local beer. ***Buskett Gardens. ☎ 2145 4233. $–$$.***

**8 Clapham Junction.** Before leaving this area follow the signs marked 'cart ruts' at the southern end of Buskett Gardens. These signs point visitors along a track that leads east, to the right of which is Clapham Junction—a matrix of ruts gouged deep into a limestone pavement during prehistoric times. Examples of these intriguing ruts can be found all over Malta, but Clapham Junction, otherwise known as Misraħ Għar il-Kbir, has by far the most concentrated number. No one knows for sure if ancient cart wheels are responsible for these deep scores in the ground; some theories claim they are more likely to have been made by sledge tracks, others that they were cut for irrigation purposes.

**9 Join Malta's south coast at Dingli Cliffs.** This rugged patch of barren coastline is the highest point on the island and commands long views towards Filfla Island (see boxed text p 192) and, on a clear day, the north coast of Libya, which stands on the opposite side of the Mediterranean. A small chapel dedicated to St Mary Magdalene marks Malta's highest spot (246m) and the numerous benches strewn along the cliff top are primes places to watch

*Clapham Junction cart ruts.*



*Dingli Cliffs.*

the sunset. *Bus 81 from Valletta, via Rabat and Buskett Gardens.*
Head directly north to visit Malta's two main megalithic sites in this region, ⑩ **Ta'Ħaġrat Temples** on the outskirts of Mġarr (see p 30, bullet ⑦) and ⑪ **Skorba Temples** to the east (see p 30, bullet ⑧), both of which can be reached via bus 47 from Valletta.

Rejoin the coast north west of these temples at ⑫ ★★ **Golden Bay & ★★ Għajn Tuffieħa** (see p 63, bullets ⑧ and ⑨). Here you can take time to lounge on the sands of two of Malta's best beaches, take to the seas with various water sports or hike along the cliffs to the north at Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park (see p 67). ***Bus 47 from Valletta or 652 from Sliema, St Julian's and Buġibba.***

⑬ **Buġibba & St Paul's Bay.** Malta's opposite coastline is only a short distance away at this narrow point on the island and Golden Bay is connected to Buġibba & St Paul's Bay by one straight main road. For information on the sights in this area connected to St Paul, see p 39, bullet ① and for details of Buġibba's waterfront see p 62, bullet ⑤.

**Malta's Classic Car Museum** (☎ *2157 8885. www.classiccarsmalta.com.*) is one of the biggest attractions in town and a short walk north from Buġibba's bus terminus along Triq it-Turisti. Here you can drool over classic vehicles dating back over 50 years of motoring, all lovingly restored to perfection. On the far western outskirts of Buġibba stands **Wignacourt Tower,** Malta's oldest surviving coastal defence tower. Built in 1609 by Grand Master Wignacourt, the tower was restored in the 1970s and offers visitors a glimpse of the life for the soldiers who would have been posted here centuries ago. ***Triq it-Torri. ☎ 2122 5222. www.dinlarthelwa.org. Admission 3€ adults, children free. Mon–Wed and Fri 10am–1pm, Sat 10am–noon. Buses to Buġibba are 49, 58, 59 and 159 from Valletta and 70, 645 and 652 from Sliema and St Julian's.***

## Take a Break

⑭ ★★ **Capu Vino.** Tucked away on a quiet side street, this stylish café and wine bar serves a large selection of local and imported wines alongside good coffee and light bites. ***198 Triq Sant'Antnin. ☎ 2701 8866. $.***

15 **Mellieħa** is Malta's most northerly town. Its proximity to one of Malta's best beaches—16 ★★ **Mellieħa Bay** (see p 62, bullet 6)—and good dive sites ensures that the town attracts a large number of outdoor loving visitors. The centre of town is a jumble of attractive steep streets dominated by the Church of Our Lady of Victory, which stands proud on a high ridge at the north end of town and commands long views over Mellieħa Bay and Comino in the distance. Down a level from the church is ★ the **Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa** (see p 42, bullet 8) and its supremely tranquil courtyard. Close to these churches is the Grotto of the Madonna, Mellieħa's other main religious site. The grotto is located across the road from the sanctuary and reached via a steep flight of steps that leads off Triq Ġorġ Borġ Olivier. A large statue of the Madonna stands in the grotto's altar watching over the spring waters that flow into it—waters that are believed to heal sick children. The other attraction is town is the **WWII Mellieħa Shelters** (see p 57, bullet 8). Buses to Mellieħa are 43, 44 and 45 from Valletta, 645 from Sliema and St Julian's, and 48 from Buġibba.

*Classic Car Museum, Buġibba.*

17 **The Marfa Ridge** crowns Malta's northern tip and is best explored on foot. For details on a walk around Marfa Ridge see Walk Two on p 74. This walk include details on how to visit 18 **St Agatha's Tower**—better known as the Red Tower.

Conclude this tour by kicking back on the sands of 19 ★ **Paradise Bay** beach (see p 63, bullet 7). Ċirkewwa and the ferry to Gozo are just over the headland from this pretty bay from where you can hook into the next regional tour of Gozo (see p 108).

*Mellieħa Bay.*

# Where to **Stay**

## Mdina & Rabat

For accommodation options in Mdina, see p 141 and for in Rabat, see p 146.

## Golden Bay

★★ kids **Radisson SAS Golden Sands Resort & Spa** This relatively new addition to Malta's five star resorts stands on a ridge above Golden Bay and is an excellent choice for anyone seeking a resort based beach holiday. A daily programme of events, including children's activities, are laid on, as are pools, restaurants, bars and a private beach. *Golden Bay. ☎ 2356 1000. www.goldensands.malta.radisson sas.com. 337 rooms and suites. Rooms 149–320€, suites 370–500€ per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

## St Paul's Bay Area

**Bella Vista Hotel** Popular with a young crowd and a good budget option on the edge of Buġibba, Bella Vista comes with few frills but good facilities and generously sized rooms. *Triq il-Qawra, Qawra. ☎ 2157 0591. www.bellavista.com.mt. 157 rooms. 67–93€ high season, 33–45€ low season, per room w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★ kids **Coastline Hotel** The Coastline is a four star hotel overlooking Salina Bay and is a short walk away from Buġibba. Its many facilities are geared up for couples and families and include pools, Jacuzzi, games rooms, tennis courts and gym, while evening entertainment is on hand at its nightclubs and bars. *Salina Bay. ☎ 2157 3781. www.coastline.com. mt. 208 rooms. 142–152€ per room per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★ **Gillieru Harbour Hotel** Occupying a tiny peninsula jutting into the quiet end of Buġibba's waterfront and overlooking an old chapel, the Gillieru offers reasonably priced basic rooms with fabulous views. A restaurant, decent roof top pool, pizzeria and bar are also on site. *Triq il-Knisja, Buġibba. ☎ 2157 2723. www.gillieru.com. 74 rooms. 29–45€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, MC, V.*

*Radisson SAS Golden Sands Resort & Spa.*

*Garden pool at the Maritim Antonine Hotel & Spa.*

kids **Mediterranea Hotel and Suites** An unexpected rustic feel and elevated location overlooking, but a breathing distance from, Buġibba's waterfront, are the factors that most appeal about this four star hotel. An array of beach and nightlife spreads out nearby, or choose the hotel pool, café, bar or restaurant instead. *Triq Buġibba ☎ 2157 1118. 59 rooms. 84–148€ high season, 30–69€ low season per room. AE, DC, MC, V.*

## Mellieħa

★★ **Maritim Antonine Hotel & Spa** Stylish and chic and right in the centre of Mellieħa, the Maritim is a recommended choice if you want to be close to one of Malta's best beaches but closer still to town life. Superior facilities include a swish spa, roof top pool and landscaped gardens. *Triq Ġorġ Borġ Olivier. ☎ 2152 0933. www.maritim.com.mt. 180 rooms. 105–171€ room only. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★ kids **Solana Hotel** A relatively new four star hotel in the heart of Mellieħa, the Solana is comfortable and modern. Choose between a large room, studio or one-bedroomed apartments, all designed with both families and couple in mind. *Triq Ġorġ Borġ Olivier. ☎ 2152 2209. www.solanahotel.com. 65 units. Rooms 18.65–56€ per person per night w/breakfast. Studios 35.50–93.20€ per night and apartments 49–128€ per night. AE, DC, MC, V.*

## Marfa Ridge

★ **Paradise Bay Resort Hotel** An excellent option at this remote spot, Paradise Bay stands close to the beach that shares its name and is moments from the Gozo ferry terminal. Tennis courts, pools, a private beach and dive shop are among its facilities and evening entertainment is all laid on. *Paradise Bay, Ċirkewwa. ☎ 2152 1166. www.paradise-bay.com. 243 rooms. 20–60€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★ **The Riviera Resort and Spa** Stunning views of Comino and Gozo unfold in front of this sophisticated spa resort whose off the beaten track location ensures a good price for first class facilities. It's a recommended choice for divers because a dive shop is onsite and good dive sites are nearby. *Marfa Bay. ☎ 2152 5900. www.riviera.com.mt. 250 rooms. 70–90€ per room per night w/breakfasts. AE, DC, MC, V.*

# Where to **Drink & Dine**

## Mdina & Rabat

For dining options in Mdina see p 141 and in Rabat see p 146.

## Mosta

★★ **The Lord Nelson** *INTERNATIONAL* This inviting restaurant occupies a 300 year old townhouse just moments from Mosta Dome and serves unusual meat and fish dishes with a hint of the Caribbean. ***278 Triq Il-Kbira. ☎ 2143 2590. Mains 16–22€. MC, V. Tues–Sat dinner.***

★★ **Ta' Marija** *MALTESE/MEDITERRANEAN* One of the best restaurants for traditional Maltese food on the island, Ta' Marija lays on local entertainment to complement its traditional dishes. Reservations recommended. ***Triq il-Kostituzzjoni. ☎ 2143 4444. Mains 9–20€. MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner Mon–Sat.***

## Dingli

★★ **Bobbyland Restaurant** *MALTESE* There's no finer spot to enjoy traditional Maltese food in friendly surroundings. Views as long as the wine list stretch out to sea from Bobbyland's inviting terrace. ***Coast Road, Dingli. ☎ 2145 2895. Mains 8–18€. DC, MC, V. Open Tues–Sun lunch, Fri and Sat dinner (low season) Tues–Sat dinner (high season). Bus 81 from Valletta via Rabat stops right outside.***

## Buġibba

★ kids **Mirabelle** *ITALIAN* The tree and umbrella shaded terrace of this colourful, family-friendly restaurant is the best spot in the tourist-soaked centre of Buġibba to munch on pizza and watch Maltese life drift by. ***Triq Bajja. ☎ 2157 2163. Mains 7–18€. AE, DC, MC, V.***

★★ **Venus** *MEDITERRANEAN* High end Mediterranean fare with flair is served at this sophisticated dining option in the heart of Buġibba. Prices are slightly high for this region but the cuisine is worth every extra euro. Vegetarians need to request meat-free dishes in advance. ***Triq Bajja and Gandoffli. ☎ 2157 1604. Mains 14–24€. MC, V. Open dinner daily.***

## Mellieħa

★★ **The Arches** *SEAFOOD/FRENCH* Known for its upmarket cuisine, which includes meats such

*Fat Harry's, Buġibba.*

## Nightlife

**Buġibba is the focus of northern Malta's nightlife. The town's** large collection of bars range from Elvis tribute venues to Irish pubs as well as bars and clubs aimed at young clubbers—all of which are packed with revellers during high season, but much quieter at other times of the year. Favourite spots include Fat Harry's adjacent to the Mirabelle restaurant on Triq Bajja and the Cin Cin wine bar on Dawret il-Qawra, near the Suncrest Hotel. Buġibba's Empire Cinema Complex shows first run mainstream films on its seven screens. *(Triq il-Korp Tal-Pijunieri. ☎ 2158 1787. www.empirecinema.com.mt. Tickets 5.82€* adults, 3.49€ children).

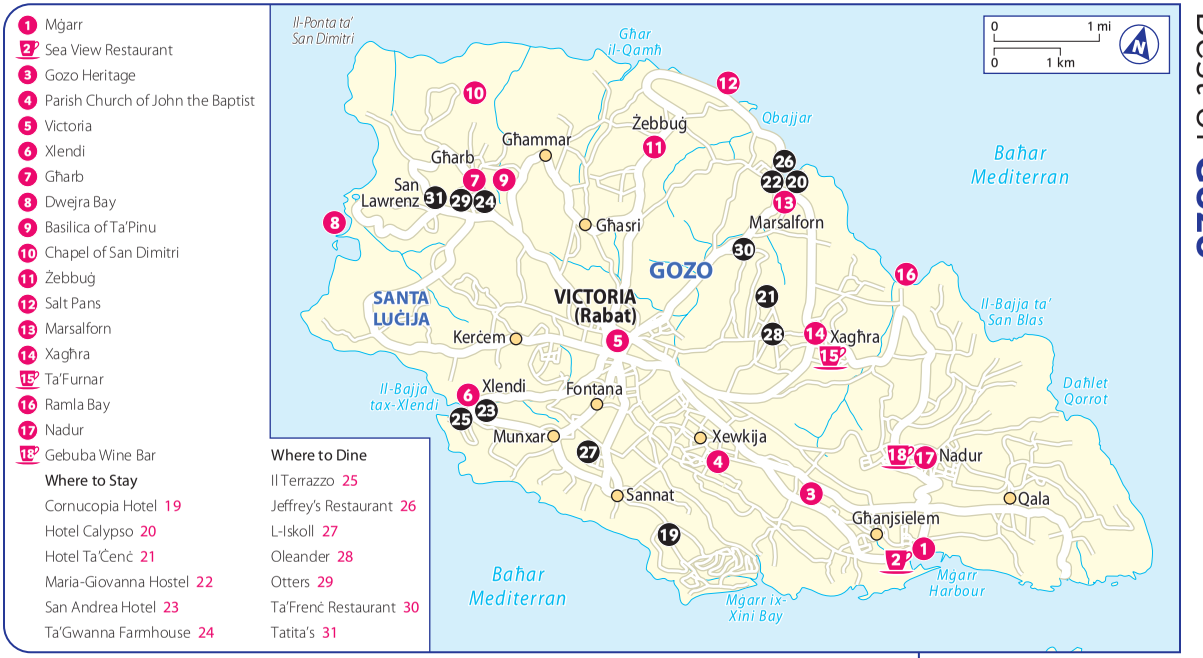
From June–September Gianpula *(www.gianpula.com)*, Malta's largest open air club, comes to life on the eastern outskirts of Rabat. The club is open every Friday and Saturday night during these months, has a capacity of 4,000 and hosts events by some of the world's biggest DJs and worldwide club tours such as the Ministry of Sound. Another large open club, Numero Uno *(www.clubnumerouno.com)* sets up near the Ta'Qali Crafts Village on Saturday and Sunday nights in summer. Check the clubs' websites or *www.clubbinmalta.com* for more information, or look out for flyers and listings in the local media.

as duck and veal, chic décor, extensive wine list and smart casual dress code, The Arches is one for that special night out in style. Reservations recommended. ***Triq Ġorġ Borġ Olivier. ☎ 2152 3460. Mains 9–23€. MC, V. Mon–Sat dinner.***

**★★ Giuseppe's Restaurant & Wine Bar** *MEDITERRANEAN/MALTESE* Locals drive across the island to dine at Giuseppe's where fresh seasonal ingredients are transformed into inventive dishes. The ambiance is rustic and relaxed and reservations are recommended. ***Triq Ġorġ Borġ Olivier. ☎ 2157 4882. Mains 9–15€ AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat dinner.***

**★ Il-Miṫħna** *INTERNATIONAL/LOCAL* Housed in a 400 year old windmill, Il-Miṫħna serves local and international dishes in its carefully renovated old mill room and outdoor courtyard. Portions are large and the desserts are excellent. ***Triq il-Kbira. ☎ 2152 0404. Mains 12–18€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat dinner.***

*Il-Miṫħna, Mellieħa.*


1 Mġarr
2 Sea View Restaurant
3 Gozo Heritage
4 Parish Church of John the Baptist
5 Victoria
6 Xlendi
7 Għarb
8 Dwejra Bay
9 Basilica of Ta'Pinu
10 Chapel of San Dimitri
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Għasri
Marsalforn
GOZO
SANTA LUĊIJA
VICTORIA (Rabat)
Kerċem
Xagħra
Il-Bajja ta' San Blas
Dahlet Qorrot
Il-Bajja tax-Xlendi
Xlendi
Fontana
Munxar
Xewkija
Nadur
Sannat
Qala
Għanjsielem
Mġarr Harbour
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay
0 1 mi
0 1 km

**Malta's sister island of Gozo is characterised by dramatic coastlines,** rolling countryside, sleepy villages and an altogether more laid back way of life. Gozo has only a 10th of the population of Malta so there's plenty of space to take a deep breath and relax into a slow pace to discover fertile valleys, outstanding churches, fine local foods and some of Malta's most exclusive retreat resorts. All roads on the island fan out from Victoria and any tour involves weaving in and out of the centre of the island. But don't be under pressure to hire a car because this is rich walking and cycling territory and, with the sea never far away, it's also an idyllic spot for diving and water-based activities.

## Travel

For information on the ferry service between Malta and Gozo see p 163 and for details of Gozo's bus services see p 161.

**1 This tour starts at Mġarr,** which is known to many as the gateway to Gozo because the ferries from Malta dock in the town's small but hard working harbour. The neo-gothic Church of Our Lady of Lourdes stands on a high rocky ridge above the harbour and its lofty presence dominates the town. To the left (south west) of the church is Fort Chambray (see boxed text below). ***Bus 25 from Victoria.***

## Take a Break

**2 Sea View Restaurant.** The wooden balcony of this waterfront restaurant is a good place to lunch on steak or seafood and be entertained by the bustle of Mġarr's harbour. ***15 Triw ix-Xatt, Mġarr. ☎ 2156 554. $–$$.***

**3 kids Gozo Heritage.** A popular stop on most organised tours, Gozo Heritage is en route between Mġarr and Victoria and leads visitors through a series of tableaux depicting key moments from the past 7,000 years of the island's history. The building itself is lovely, and the attraction is an option for a rainy

*Mġarr Harbour, Gozo.*

## Fort Chambray

**Work started on building Fort Chambray in 1749 and it was to** be the Knights of St John's last fortification. The intention was to construct a miniature Valletta on Gozo, which would eventually take over from the Citadel as the island's main fortified town—in the same way Valletta supplanted Mdina. Fort Chambray was called to action during the resistance to the French occupation of Malta in 1798 but due to lack of funds it was never completed. Recent attempts have been made to revive the fort by converting it into a luxury hotel and swanky apartments, but at the time of writing this plan was moving forward slowly and the area was closed to the public. For the best views of the Fort, head to Nadur's Ta'Kenuna Botanical Gardens (see p 47, bullet 11).

day when there's not much else to do. *45 min. Triq i-Imġ. 2156 1280. www.gozoheritage.com. Admission 4.31€ adults, 2.10€ children. 9am–4pm Mon–Sat. Bus 25 from Victoria and Mġarr.*

Make a diversion off the road to Victoria to visit the 4 **Parish Church of John the Baptist** in Xewkija. *See p 42, bullet 9. Buses 42 and 43 from Victoria.*

5 ★★★ **Victoria**, the capital of Gozo lies at the heart of the island and it takes a full day to do the city and its ancient Citadel justice. For a detailed tour of Victoria and the Citadel see p 148 and I recommend you make time to spend a night out here too.

6 ★★ **Xlendi.** The road from Victoria to Xlendi leads through the cliff-lined Xlendi Valley, and opens out into a small bay as it reaches the south west coast. Xlendi is one of Gozo's best waterfronts and well used by locals and visitors. Two shipwrecks were discovered on the sea bed here in 1961—one dating

*The small bay at Xlendi.*

back to 200 BC and the second to the 5th century. Finds from both wrecks are now on display at Gozo's Museum of Archaeology (see p 150, bullet 8). For further information on Xlendi see p 64, bullet 15. ***Bus 87 from Victoria.***

7 ★★★ **Għarb**, with its Baroque Church of the Visitation (see p 43, bullet 13), pretty town square and soft surrounding countryside is one of Gozo's most appealing villages. The main road to Għarb from Victoria passes by the remains of a large aqueduct, which was built by the British in the 19th century with the aim of channelling water from Għar Ilma hill to the south of Għarb, to a reservoir in the capital. Occupying what was once a group of old houses on the edge of Għarb's main square is the Folklore Museum (☎ 2156 1929. Admission 3€. Mon–Sat 9am–4pm, Sun 9am–1pm). A trip through the museum's 28 rooms, filled with domestic and agricultural artefacts and antique tools, is an excellent way to learn about Gozo's past. ***Buses 1, 2 and 91 from Victoria***.

8 ★★ **Dwejra Bay.** Gozo's coastline takes a dramatic turn directly west of Għarb at Dwejra Bay. The bay's star attraction is the much photographed Azure Window, a

*Għarb's village square and church.*

stunning natural archway carved into high limestone cliffs—visit on a windy day to witness waves smashing through. The second natural landmark is a small Inland Sea, whose calm waters are connected to the Mediterranean Sea via a tunnel running through thick cliffs. And standing just off shore, directly opposite the Azure Window, is Fungus Rock. This large craggy lump of a rock derives its bizarre name from a medicinal parasitic plant discovered growing on top of it by the Knights. The plant looks like a fungus as it has no green leaves, and

## Where to Shop

Outside of Victoria, the Ta'Dbieġi Crafts Village on the main road between Għarb and San Lawrenz is the place on Gozo to shop for local arts and crafts. The village is similar to Malta's Ta' Qali but with stone buildings instead of old tin huts housing the shops, it is altogether a nicer set up. And there's a good array of crafts to browse through including glass and lace makers, leather works, jewellers and a candle shop. There's also a branch of Gozo Glass *(www.gozoglass.com)*, who produce delicate handmade glass inspired by the island's colours, at Dwejra Bay.

*Azure Window at Dwerja Bay.*

was used extensively by the Knights in their hospitals. Today the rock and its rare plant are protected and off limits. Before heading back inland from Dwejra Bay take a peak inside the tiny and simple Chapel of St Anne. ***Bus 91 from Rabat Mar–Oct.***

Head back through Għarb to visit the ★★ **Basilica of Ta'Pinu**. ***See p 43, bullet 14. Bus 91 from Victoria via Għarb.***

**10 Chapel of San Dimitri.** Make a detour to the fields north of the Basilica to reach the Chapel of San Dimitri. This small, plain, weather-beaten square church stands alone amid these fields and, although not often open to visitors, it's one of Gozo's most striking sights. ***No public transport.***

**11 Żebbuġ.** If you can travel through the village of Żebbuġ to reach Gozo's north coast. Built over two plateaus, Żebbuġ is the island's highest village and panoramic views of the island stretch out in all directions before the road steeply descends, via numerous hairpin bends, to the sea. If you pass through the village on a Saturday or Sunday between 11am and 4pm call into the **Farmhouse Gallery** in the centre of the village to view the paintings and photographs of artist Jörg Böttcher. ***21 Skapuccina Street. ☎ 2156 1434. www.joergboettcher.com. Bus 91 from Rabat.***

**12 ★★ The fields of salt pans** that line Gozo's north coast around Xwieni and Qbajjar Bays make for an almost alien landscape. The pans are large, shallow shelves carved into the rocky shoreline and naturally collect sea water from the waves that wash over them in winter. During the summer months the water in the pans evaporates leaving the salt to be harvested and sold. There is no public transport along this stretch of coastline, but the pans are easily reached on foot from Marsalforn via Qbajjar Promenade.

**13 Marsalforn**, see p 64, bullet 11. ***Bus 21 from Victoria.***

*Views of Gozo from Żebbuġ.*

*Fields of salt pans.*

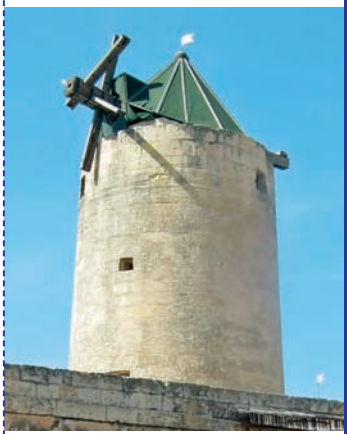
14 ★★ **Xagħra** is another of Gozo's enchanting villages and its large main square is one of my favourite places to lunch. Overlooking the square is the Church of Our Lady of Victory whose interior is rich with gilt and exudes a dark splendour. Xagħra's biggest attraction is the ★ **Ġgantija Temples,** Malta's oldest megalithic site (see p 31, bullet 9). Just north of the temples on Triq il-Bambina is the **Ta'Kola Windmill.** This typical Gozo windmill was built in 1725 and has been restored to its original glory complete with recreated living quarters and a small folklore museum. *(☎ 2156 1071. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 3.50€ adults, 1.16€ children. am–5pm daily).*

The final attraction in town, the **Pomskizillous Museum of Toys** (see p 50, bullet 6) is one for both adults and children. *Buses 64 and 65 from Victoria.*

## Take a Break

15 ★ **Ta'Furnar.** This family run restaurant housed in an old bake-house opposite the Museum of Toys has the only traditional stone oven left in the Maltese islands and uses it to cook melt-in-the-mouth traditional Gozitan foods. *136 Triq Gnien Xibla, Xagħra. ☎ 2155 6372. $–$$*

16 ★★★ **Ramla Bay**, *see p 64, bullet 11.*



*Ta'Kola Windmill, Xagħra.*

## Xagħra Day Ticket

A day ticket for Xagħra can be bought at either the Ġgantija Temples or the Ta'Kola Windmill and allows entry to both attractions for 4.66€.

# Ta'Ċenċ Cliffs

**Ta'Ċenċ to the south east of Sannat village is home to Gozo's** most spectacular cliffs. The wild natural habitats clinging to the cliff's edge make up one of the most scenic coastal areas on the island and supports many species of local plants and birdlife—some of the latter nest in the nooks and crannies in the cliff face. Although this is a delightful place to wander, and you can expect to stumble across the odd old cart rut (see p 101) if you do, the best views of this breath-taking region are to be gleaned at water level. And with the Gozo ferry passing close by, there's no need to take an organised tour to see them from this vantage point.

17 **Nadur** clings to the edge of a high ridge overlooking Gozo's far eastern tip. The town's name means 'lookout' as it commands far reaching views over the sea channels around Comino and Malta—for the best views of these channels and the surrounding countryside head up to the town's **Ta'Kenuna Botanical** Gardens (see p 47, bullet 11). Anyone interested in Malta's maritime history should call into the Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum on Triq Il-Kappillan where three centuries of navel history, from sailing ships to WWII battleships, is spread out before you. *(☎ 2156 5226. Admission 2.33€ adults, 1.16€ children. Mon–Sat 9am–4.45pm).*

The town's other claim to fame is its Church of Saints Peter and Paul at the head of Nadur's main square, which is one of Gozo's architectural masterpieces. *Buses 42 and 43 from Victoria.*

*Church of Saints Peter and Paul on the main square in Nadur.*

## Take a Break

18 ★★ **Gebuba Wine Bar.** End your tour of Gozo with a glass of local wine or a cocktail at this cheerful and cosy wine bar in the heart of Nadur's town square, which opens at 8pm. *5 Pjaza San Pietru u San Pawl, Nadur. ☎ 7947 0141. $.*

From Nadur it's a short trip back to Mġarr Harbour and the ferry back to Malta.

# Where to **Stay**

## Victoria

For details of accommodation in Victoria, see p 154.

**★★ kids Cornucopia Hotel**
Located on a high ridge on the outskirts of Xagħra, the Cornucopia combines traditional rustic Gozitan style with laid back luxury. The hotel, with its landscaped pools and reading room, contains rooms of varying sizes, while a nearby complex of designer bungalows are well set up for those wanting to cater for themselves. *Triq Ġnien Imrik, Xagħra. ☎ 2155 6486. www.cornucopiahotel.com. 48 rooms and 11 bungalows. Rooms 28–37€ low season, 52–62€ high season per person per night w/breakfast. Bungalows 47–72€ low season, 79–142€ high season per bungalow per night. AE, MC, V.*

**★★ kids Hotel Calypso** Occupying the far eastern end of Marsalforn Bay and fully refurbished a couple of years ago, this large, modern hotel offers contemporary accommodation right on the water's edge. Squash, tennis, diving and swimming are on hand by day and live music and fine dining by night. *Triq il-Port, Marsalforn. ☎ 2156 2000. www.hotelcalypsogozo.com. 100 rooms. 28–45€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, MC, V.*

**★★★ Hotel Ta'Ċenċ** Known as 'the island within an island', Ta'Ċenċ is an exclusive haven of tranquillity backing onto unspoilt countryside and Ta'Ċenċ cliffs. Every room comes with its own terrace or small garden and an array of onsite leisure facilities, private beach and first class dining options ensure you'll never want to leave. *Triq Ta'Ċenċ, Sannat. ☎ 2155 6819. www.vjborg.com/tacenc. 83 rooms. 59–105€ low season, 82–140 € high season, per person per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

**★★ Maria-Giovanna Hostel**
One of the best budget accommodation options in Malta, this spotless

*Cornucopia Hotel, Xagħra.*

## Gozo Farmhouses

**Many visitors to Gozo choose to rent traditional farmhouses. These** rustic properties are often hundreds of years old and inject a dose of local flavour into the island's range of accommodation options. Most are located in or around Gozo's central villages and are a good option for families or couples wanting privacy and to cater for themselves. Rates vary seasonally and in low season it's possible to pick up a bargain for a long term rental or stay for just a night or long weekend. Listed below are some of the companies who rent farmhouses, but like Ta'Gwanna above, many more are available through private landlords.

**Gozo Great Escapes** ☎ *2141 9405 www.gozogreatescape.com*

**Gozo Village Holidays** ☎ *2156 3520 www.gozovillageholidays.com*

**Gozo Farmhouses** ☎ *2156 1280 www.gozofarmhouses.com*

**Gozo Luxury Farmhouses** ☎ *2156 0041 www.gozo.com/luxuryfarmhouses*

**Les Olives Farmhouses** ☎ *2156 0750 www.lesolives.com*

and well loved Maltese townhouse just back from the waterfront consists of a small number of basic rooms that ooze local charm. The owners are incredibly friendly and the home-made breakfasts simply delicious. ***Triq ir-Rabat. Marsalforn. ☎ 2155 3630. www.tamariagozo.com. 40–60€ per room per night w/breakfast. No credit cards.***

*Ta'Gwanna Farmhouse, Għarb.*

**★ San Andrea Hotel** This small, family run and welcoming hotel overlooks Xlendi's small waterfront. The rooms have few frills but the roof top terrace and guest lounge both provide long harbour views and peace and quiet, and the hotel's restaurant specialises in local cuisine. ***Xatt ix-Xlendi, Xlendi. ☎ 2156 5555. www.hotelsanandrea.com. 28 rooms. 21–57€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.***

**★★★ Ta'Gwanna Farmhouse** I love this privately owned traditional farmhouse situated on a quiet street just off Għarb's pretty village square. Characterised by thick stone walls, this labyrinth like comfortable property sleeps up to seven and includes a good sized pool, large sun area and fabulous kitchen. ***Triq Dun Alwig Mizzi, Għarb. ☎ 2155 6716. www.gozo.com/tagwanna. 95€ per person per night high season, 60€ per night low season. No credit cards, but you can pay via Internet banking.***

# Where to **Dine**

### Victoria Dining

For details on places to dine in Victoria, see p 154.

★ **Il Terrazzo** *MALTESE/ITALIAN* Prominently situated for watching the sunset and mellow views of Xlendi Bay, Il Terrazzo serves a mix of traditional Gozitain and Italian dishes alongside 187 different wines. ***Triq San Xmun, Xlendi. ☎ 2155 0248. Mains 8–22€. AE, MC, V. Daily lunch & dinner.***

★ **Jeffrey's Restaurant** *MALTESE* You can't miss this bright terracotta restaurant on the outskirts of Għarb, which serves traditional Maltese food made from local ingredients in its simply elegant dining room or inviting outdoor terrace. ***Triq il-Għarb, Għarb. ☎ 2156 1006. Mains 13–20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Dinner Apr–Oct Mon–Sat.***

★★ **L-Iskoll** *MALTESE/MEDITERRANEAN* Feast on traditional Gozo food with flare or a range of Mediterranean dishes on an inner courtyard or rustic dining room at this tranquil restaurant close to Ta'Ċenċ cliffs. ***26 Triq Skerla, Sannat. ☎ 2155 7568. Mains 5–13€. AE, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

*Oleander, Xagħra.*

★★ **Oleander** *MALTESE/MEDITERRANEAN* There's no finer place to enjoy lunch in the sun or evening meal than on Oleander's pavement terrace overlooking Xagħra's main square. The meat-heavy menu includes local dishes such as rabbit and some fresh fish. ***10 Pjazza***

## Gozo Nightlife

Gozo's two best nightclubs are located on the outskirts of Xlendi on the main road to Victoria. The palm fringed La Grotta features indoor and outdoor dance floors and of its five bars, three are set in a large natural cave. The smaller Club Paradiso sits above La Grotto and is characterised by deep sofas and a more commercial sound that includes chart music and R&B. For further details on both clubs see *www.lagrottaleisure.com* and for information on nightlife in Victoria see p 154.

*Vittorja, Xagħra.* ☎ *2155 7230. Mains 8–14€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun lunch and dinner.*

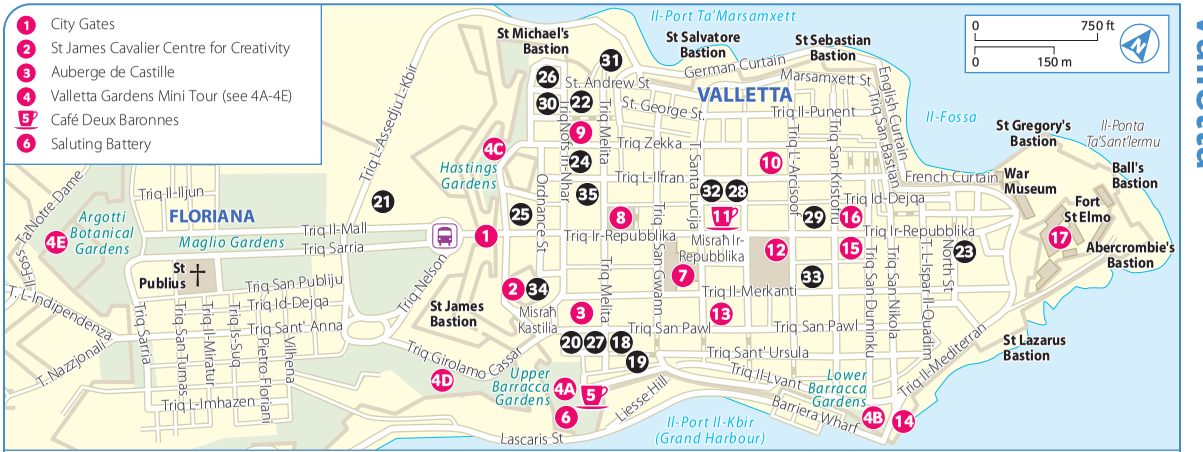
★ **Otters** *MEDITERRANEAN* This bistro style restaurant at the far western end of Marsalforn Bay is one of the smartest dining options in town. Simple, well cooked good food is served on an attractive canopied terrace overlooking the water's edge. *Triq Santa Marija, Marsalforn.* ☎ *2156 2473. Mains 7–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Open daily lunch and dinner.*

★★★ **Ta'Frenċ Restaurant** *INTERNATIONAL* Housed in a 600 year old farmhouse and surrounded by a fragrant herb garden, Ta'Frenċ is one of Gozo's best restaurants. The seasonally changing menu is heavy with local ingredients and the wine list award winning. Reservations recommended for dinner. *Triq ir-Rabat, 1½ km south of Marsalforn.* ☎ *2155 3888. Mains 10–24€, 3 courses 27€ or 5 courses 45€. AE, MC, V. Lunch and dinner daily except Tuesdays.*

★ **Tatita's** *MALTESE/MEDITERRANEAN* Dine al fresco on San Lawrenz's pretty town square and in the shadow of its parish church at this swish restaurant where fresh local ingredients are transformed into Maltese dishes. *Pjazza San Lawrenz, San Lawrenz.* ☎ *2156 6482. Mains 7–10€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily Mar–Oct lunch and dinner.* ●

*Tatita's, San Lawrenz.*

# 6 The Best **Cities & Towns**




7 St John's Co-Cathedral
8 National Museum of Archaeology
9 National Museum of Fine Art
10 Teatru Manoel
11 Caffe Cordina
12 Grand Master's Palace
13 Church of St Paul's Shipwreck
14 Siege Bell Memorial
15 Casa Rocca Piccola
16 Toy Museum
17 Fort St Elmo

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**Valletta Gardens Mini Tour**

4A Upper Barrakka Gardens
4B Lower Barrakka Gardens
4C Hastings Gardens
4D Herbert Ganado Gardens
4E Floriana's Argotti Botanical Gardens and St Philips Gardens

**Built by the Knights of St John following the Great Siege of 1565,** Valletta, Malta's splendid capital, occupies the seaward tip of the Sciberras peninsular and was designed to be both a fortress and a city. Within its imposing fortifications that overlook the Grand and Marsamxett harbours, Valletta's small grid of narrow streets ooze history and are easy to explore on foot. Some of Malta's finest attractions are located here and their self assured grandeur perfectly complements the allure of the city's lesser known nooks and crannies. Valletta is also an unrivalled place to eat out in Malta and you can expect an array of chic restaurants and fine wine bars to satisfy all tastes. Those who linger after the day trippers depart can enjoy the island's finest cultural nightlife. Most visitors arrive in Valletta via the large bus terminus just outside of the City Gates. However, a regular ferry service traverses Marsamxett Harbour between Sliema and Valletta (see p 163).

**1 City Gates.** For the first time visitor, the only way to approach Valletta is via its stately City Gate, known as Bieb il-Belt in Maltese. The gate currently in situ is Valletta's fourth and was inaugurated in 1964 during Malta's independence celebrations. As you walk through its deep arches into Misraħ il-Ħelsien (Freedom Square), Triq ir-Repubblika, Valletta's wide main street, stretches downhill towards Fort St Elmo at the far eastern end of the city. The ruins of Valletta's Royal Opera House, destroyed on 7 April 1942 by Luftwaffe bombers, fill the right hand side of the square. Opposite the ruins, and with a facade reminiscent of a Venetian palace, is the Palazzo Ferreria, which once housed the Knights' foundry.

**2 ★★ St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity,** *see p 34, bullet 5.*

**3 ★ Auberge de Castille.** Once the official auberge of the Knights of the Langue of Castille, this stunning building is one of Valletta's finest Baroque masterpieces. It's served as the headquarters for both the French occupation forces and the British army and today houses the offices of Malta's Prime Minister. ***Pjazza Kastilja. Not open to the public.***

*Auberge de Castille, Valletta.*

**4 Valletta Gardens Mini Tour.** Valletta is home to a number of charming gardens that serve as tranquil havens of peace far removed from the city's busy main streets. All of those included in this mini tour are free and two are located in the suburb of Floriana, south west of Valletta. For more information on the sights in Floriana en route to these gardens, see the walking tour p 70.

**4A ★ Upper Barrakka Gardens** are set deep within Valletta's fortifications and claim magnificent views over the Grand Harbour and Three Cities. Its fragrant pathways, dotted with fountains, monuments and numerous benches, are well used by the city's business folk and tourists alike. Upper Barrakka is a good choice for families as its busy café serves ice creams and soft drinks. *Pjazza Kastilja.*

**4B ★★ Lower Barrakka Gardens** are slightly removed from the well trodden tourist and business areas of Valletta, making it one of the city's quietest gardens and my favourite. Romantic double seater benches overlook the Grand Harbour and are the place to watch cruise ships entering the city's waters, while shaded pathways provide a relaxed peace broken only by bird song. *Triq il-Mediterran.*

*Lower Barrakka Gardens.*

**4C Hastings Gardens** sit on top on the bastions above the City Gate and are dedicated to former British governor Lord Hastings who is buried among the garden's formal pathways and flowerbeds. Hastings Gardens boast fine views over Valletta's fortifications and Marsamxett Harbour and are well used by locals. *Triq Papa Piju V.*

**4D Herbert Ganado Gardens** are the least used of all Valletta's gardens and seem to hang off the city walls close to the bus terminus. Graffiti dating back to the 1960s is carved into limestone walls and landscaped seating areas with shaded benches make for a more pleasant place to wait for your bus than the terminus itself. *Triq Giro Lamo Cassar.*

**4E Floriana's Argotti Botanical Gardens and St Philips Gardens** stand adjacent to each other and contain collections of exotic plants, wide pathways and ornate fountains. St Philips is the more rambling of the two and offers prime views over the Floriana Lines – 17th century fortifications that gird the town. *Triq Sarria, Floriana.*

## Take a Break

**5 ★ kids Café Deux Baronnes.** The coffee isn't the cheapest in Valletta, but the views from this terrace café—overlooking the Grand Harbour and Fort St. Angelo—are priceless. Take away meals are also available that can be munched in the nearby Upper Barrakka Gardens. *Triq Sant' Orsla. ☎ 2122 6718. $–$$.*

**6 ★ Saluting Battery.** Originally constructed by the Knights of St John in the 16th century as part of Valletta's strategic defence system, the Saluting Battery stands on the lower tier of Upper Barrakka Gardens and

*Saluting Battery.*

commands wide views over the Grand Harbour. The battery, and its row of sea facing cannons, remained in use until 1960 and have recently been restored by the Malta Heritage Trust. Today visitors can learn about the Battery's long history, see how the cannons are loaded and fired, and hear the all-important noonday gun boom out across the harbour. *30 min. Entrance is via the steps in front of the water fountain in Upper Barrakka Gardens (see p 122, bullet 4A). ☎ 2180 0992. www.wirtartna.org. Admission 5€ adults, 3€ children. Guided tours at 11am and 12.15pm daily.*

**7 ★★★ St John's Co-Cathedral,** *see p 40, bullet 3.*

**8 National Museum of Archaeology,** *see p 27, bullet 2.*

**9 ★ National Museum of Fine Art,** *see p 33, bullet 1.*

**10 Teatru Manoel,** *see p 34, bullet 3.*

## Take a Break

**11 ★★ Caffe Cordina.** Established in 1837, Caffe Cordina is one of Malta's oldest and most elegant coffee shops. An irresistible array of traditional pastries fill the menu and can be enjoyed perched at an inside counter or on a large outside terrace. *244 Triq ir-Repubblika. ☎ 2123 4385. $.*

**12 ★ Grand Master's Palace.** Originally the residence of the Grand Masters of the Knights of St John, this majestic 16th century palace currently houses the Maltese parliament. A visit incorporates two separate attractions—the State Rooms and Palace Armoury. The select and suitably regal State Rooms are linked via an imposing Armoury Corridor whose marble floor is famous for its many coats of arms of past Grand Master's and walls smothered with dramatic

## CT Cabs

CT Cabs is a fleet of chauffeur-driven electric cabs that carry up to three people at a time between their various stands around Valletta. It costs 1€ per person to travel between each stand; to use the service ☎ 2133 3321 or ☎ 7933 3321 at a stand or anywhere in the city.

images of past naval battles. The adjoining Armoury is housed in the Grand Master's old stables. Here visitors can view a vast and impressive array of armour and weaponry from across Europe and the old Ottoman Empire dating from the 16–18th centuries. 🕘 *1 hr. Triq il-Merkanti. ☎ 2124 9349. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 4.66€ adults, 2.33€ children to each attraction. Entrance fee to the Palace Armoury includes a free audio guide. Palace Armoury 9am–5pm daily, State Rooms 10am–4pm daily except Thursdays. The State Rooms are also occasionally closed when parliament is in session and during state visits.*

13 ★★ **Church of St Paul's Shipwreck,** *see p 39, bullet 2.*

14 **Siege Bell Memorial,** *see p 55, bullet 2.*

15 ★★ **Casa Rocca Piccola.** This privately owned 16th century palazzo is a fascinating insight into the life and traditions of Maltese nobility. A tour takes in around 50 rooms filled with fine collections of furniture and paintings plus an array of exquisite costumes dating back to the 1700s. 🕘 *45 min. 74 Triq ir-Repubblika. ☎ 2122 1499. www.casaroccapiccola.com. Admission via guided tour 7€ adults, 3.50€ children. Tours depart on the hour Mon–Sat 10am–4pm.*

16 **Toy Museum.** For anyone who once collected Matchbox cars or Dinky toys, the three floors of this nostalgic museum are the place to indulge in childhood memories. Most of this extensive collection, which dates back to the 1950s, is tucked away behind glass so don't expect to be able to play with your old favourites. 🕘 *30 min. 222 Triq ir-Repubblika. ☎ 2125 1652. Admission 2.50€ adults, children free. Mon–Fri 10am–3.00pm.*

17 **Fort St Elmo.** This impenetrable fort, perched on the tip of the Sciberras peninsular, was built by the Knights in 1522 to defend the entrances of the Grand and Marsamxett Harbours. St Elmo has seen plenty of military action over the centuries, from four weeks of bombardment by the invading Turks

## Valletta's Multimedia Attractions

Multimedia shows, from big screen experiences to walk through re-creations of scenes from the past, are blossoming all over Valletta. For a general taste of Malta's history and culture take time to view The Malta Experience, (see p 51, bullet 7), while those wanting to view the island's WWII history brought to big screen life should head for the Wartime Experience, (see p 55, bullet 1). Valletta's other well publicised multimedia attraction is the Knights Hospitallers (*Triq il-Mediterran. ☎ 2124 3840. Admission 4.30€* adults, 2€ children. Mon–Fri 9.30am–4pm, Sat and Sun 9.30am–4pm), a walk-through recreation of Malta's Golden Age of chivalrous knights whose highlight is the building it's housed in—the Sacra Infermeria. Built in 1574, this was once the Knights' finest hospital where patients were served on silver plates in order, so it was believed, to prevent infection.

## Valletta Shopping

Valletta's many shops range from well known chain stores to small local outlets. A string of fine jewellery shops selling detailed silver filigree work line Triq Santa Luċija close to St John's Co-Cathedral and Triq ir-Repubblika near Casa Rocca Piccola. I recommend Ardnael Filigree *(77 Triq ir-Repubblika, ☎ 2124 6192)* where you can watch filigree work being made. For locally produced arts and crafts, visit the Malta Crafts Centre *(Misraħ San Ġwann, ☎ 2122 4532)*, which sells a range of ceramics, lace and artwork made on the island. For exquisite hand-made glass from the Phoenician Glassblowers *(www.phoenicianglass.com)*, try the neighbouring The Glass House *(Misraħ San Ġwann, ☎ 2143 7041)*. The best bookstore in town is the Agenda Bookshop *(26 Triq ir-Repubblika, ☎ 2133 3621)* where you can browse through a varied selection of international and local books. A street market sets up on Triq ir-Merkanti until 2pm every day, except Sunday when a larger version of the same market is held on the south side of the city's bus terminal.

during the Great Siege of 1565, to bomb damage in WWII. Today St Elmo is home to Malta's Police Academy and is generally closed to the public. However, visitors can gain access by attending one of the regular historical re-enactments that take place inside the fort throughout the year. Visitors can choose between **In Guardia**, a 40-minute recreation of a 16th century military parade or the less frequent **Alarme!**, which over 55 minutes portrays encounters between French troops and Maltese militias in the late 18th century. ***☎ 2123 7747. Cost for each re-enactment 4.66€ adults, 1.16€ children. For more information and dates for both of these events, pick up a leaflet from the Tourist Information (see p 166) or visit the Event's section of www.visitmalta.com.***

If your visit doesn't coincide with one of these events, you can snatch a peak of St Elmo's battlements from a large forecourt in front of the fort at the end of *Triq ir-Repubblika*, from where you can walk back the length of this street to the City Gates.

*Triq ir-Repubblika, Valletta's main street.*

# Where to **Stay**

★ **Asti Guesthouse** Located close to Valletta's waterfront, this charming, family run, traditional Maltese guesthouse is one of the best budget options in Malta. The rooms are large and spotless and the owners exceptionally friendly. *18 Triq Sant'Orsla. ☎ 2123 9506. www.mol.net.mt/asti. 8 rooms. 17€ per person per night w/breakfast. Cash only.*

**British Hotel** Stunning panoramic views of the Grand Harbour are this basic and laid back hotel's biggest selling point. Views can be enjoyed from the hotel's restaurant and bar, but it's worth paying the extra to bag a waterfront room. *40 Triq il-Batterija. ☎ 2122 4730. www.britishhotel.com. 44 rooms. 50–60€ per room, 60–70€ with harbour view, both w/breakfast. AE, MC, V.*

★ **Castille Hotel** Built on the site of the old Spanish Auberge, the Castille is one Valletta's more upmarket hotels. Facilities include two fine restaurants, a coffee shop and guest lounges, while each room features satellite TV and air conditioning. *Pjazza Kastilja. ☎ 2124 3677. www.hotelcastillemalta.com. 38 rooms. 40–50€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★★★ **Hotel Phoenicia** Located just outside of Valletta's City Gate, The Phoenicia is this city's most luxurious hotel. Rooms are spacious and elegant and an outdoor pool with sundeck, picturesque gardens, fine dining and free beach shuttle bus are all part of the superb service. *The Mall, Floriana. ☎ 2122 5241. www.phoeniciamalta.com. 136 rooms. 115–260€ per double room. AE, DC, MC, V.*

*Valletta G-House.*

**The Osborne** This recently refurbished hotel offers comfortable rooms with basic amenities and some with views. The roof top features a large Jacuzzi and sun deck, and a decent bar and restaurant are located on the ground floor. *Triq Nofs in-Nhar. ☎ 2124 3656. www.osbornehotel.com. 59 rooms. 65–72€ per room w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.*

★★★ **Valletta G-House** This fabulous 16th century Valletta town house has been restored with flair and is the city's most romantic self catering option. The large double bedroom includes an enclosed balcony and a bottle of Maltese wine awaits all visitors in the rustic cellar kitchen. *Triq it-Tramuntana. ☎ UK +44 (0) 781 39 888 27. www.valletta house.com. 497–535€ per week. Bookings can be made through an online enquiry form or phone a UK number to book in person. Pay in advance via PayPal or cheque.*

*Hotel Phoenicia, Valletta.*

# Where to **Drink & Dine**

★★ **Café Jubilee** *WINE BAR/CAFÉ* Very popular with the locals, this fun, funky and friendly bistro style wine bar and café also serves a range of light meals. One of my favourite spots in the city with the added bonus of free WiFi. *125 Triq Santa Luċija. ☎ 2125 2332. Mains 3–8€. DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat early until late.*

★ **Cocopazzo** *SEAFOOD/MEDITERRANEAN* This colourful, cosy and unpretentious restaurant is best known for its fresh fish dishes. The menu features many choices of, often unusual, seafood such as barracuda and homemade pasta is also a specialty. *Valletta Buildings, Triq Nofs in-Nhar. ☎ 2123 5706. Mains 10–22€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.*

★★ **D'Office** *MEDITERRANEAN/WINE BAR* I like this cheerful and laid back bistro for its friendly atmosphere, simple stylish décor and excellent, yet reasonably priced, food—all washed down with a varied selection of local and international wines. *132 Triq L'Aċisqof. ☎ 2122 1475. Mains 4–8€. AE, MC, V. Lunch Mon–Sat, dinner Tues–Sat.*

★★★ **Fusion Four** *INTERNATIONAL* Tucked away near Hastings Gardens, this stylish yet fun restaurant and wine bar is well worth seeking out. A pretty outdoor terrace overlooks the City Gates and the food, an unusual twist of international and local influences, is accompanied by a first class wine list. *Triq San Ġwann Kavalier. ☎ 2122 5255. Mains 15–20€. AE, MC, V. Lunch Wed–Fri, dinner daily.*

*Café life in Valletta.*

★★★ **Giannini** *MODERN MEDITERRANEAN/MALTESE* A favourite of Valletta's most fashionable, this elegant restaurant boasts stunning views over Marsamxett Harbour and an equally impressive menu of Mediterranean fusion dishes. ***Triq il-Mitħna. ☎ 2123 7121. Mains 14–24€. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch Mon–Fri, dinner Mon–Sat.***

★ **Inspirations** *WINE BAR/CAFÉ* Part of the St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, Inspirations is an oasis of artistic calm within sight of the city gates. A simple sheltered terrace caters for those who prefer al fresco and the varied menu is well-suited to vegetarians. If wine isn't your favourite tipple, choose from a range of organic herbal teas and fine coffees. ***Triq Nofs in-Nhar. ☎ 2124 1224. Mains 3–7€. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch Mon–Sat, dinner Thurs–Sat.***

★ kids **La Cave** *PIZZERIA* This traditional pizzeria is located inside the Castille Hotel's 400 year old, vaulted ceiling cellar. Large pizzas

## Valletta Waterfront

A row of elegant old warehouses lining Valletta's waterfront, at the Pinto Marina where visiting cruise ships dock, has been transformed into a lively stretch of restaurants, trendy bars and shops. This area is popular with visitors and locals alike and infused with an ambience all of its own at night (www.vallettawaterfront.com).

## Valletta's Nightlife

Much of Valletta's nightlife focuses on its waterfront development (see box p 128). However, for more culturally orientated things to do after dark, visit the St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity (see p 34, bullet 4), which programmes a varied range of contemporary theatre and cinema throughout the year. Or try the Teatru Manoel (see p 34, bullet 3), whose splendid auditorium is the place to catch theatre, music events including classical concerts and an annual spring Opera Festival. And for mainstream films visit Embassy Cinemas *(Triq Santa Luċija, ☎ 2122 2225. www.embassycomplex.com.mt)*.

and pasta dishes are served on wooden tables and the extensive wine list includes bottles from 5€ to 256€. ***Pjazza Kastilja. ☎ 2124 3677. Mains 6–10€. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch Mon–Fri, dinner daily.***

★★ **Papannis** *MEDITERRANEAN/MALTESE* One step removed from the tourist bustle, this traditional and friendly bistro sits on a quiet back street and dishes up a continually changing menu of unusual pastas, fresh fish and local meat dishes in cosy romantic surroundings. ***55 Triq id-Dejqa. ☎ 2725 1960. Mains 7–19€. AE, DC, MC, V. Summer lunch and dinner Mon–Sat, winter lunch and dinner Tues–Sun.***

★★ **Spezzo** *MODERN MEDITERRANEAN* A refreshing breath of the contemporary air on Valletta's dining scene, Spezzo is just minutes from the Grand Master's Palace. The plush interior combines a modern ambience with traditional Baroque and it specialises in Maltese dishes and Mediterranean cuisine. ***113 Triq L'Aċsqof. ☎ 2122 8500. Mains 8–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch and dinner Tues–Sun.***

★ **The Spoon** *CHINESE* Expect delicious oriental food and a relaxed atmosphere at this colourful Chinese restaurant opposite Hastings Gardens. The menu features a smattering of vegetarian options and gluten free dishes are available. ***Triq il-Mitħna. ☎ 2125 0837. Mains 7–15€. MC. Tues–Sat dinner only.***

★★ **Trabuxu** *WINE BAR* An intimate and old cellar bar whose small range of platters and pasta dishes are just as good as the choice of around 200 wines. Outdoor seats line steps outside or you can soak up the warm ambience inside. ***Triq id-Dejqa. ☎ 2122 3036. Mains 5–10€. MC, V. Lunch and dinner Tues–Sat.***

★★ **TwoTwentyTwo** *MODERN INTERNATIONAL* Carved into the city's old bastion walls, this minimalist restaurant and wine bar is a stylish blend of Valletta's past and present. It is an unexpectedly modern and trendy restaurant whose select menu reflects this attractive blend of old and new—all accompanied by an extensive wine list. ***222 Triq l-Assedju l-Kbir. ☎ 2733 3222. Mains 14–22€. AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch and dinner Tues–Sat. Sometimes closed for private functions.***

# Vittoriosa

0 750 ft
0 100 m
Dahla tal-Kalkara
Il-Mandragg
H. Tabone
G. Cassar
Ix-Xatt
Triq San Dwardu
La Valette
Triq San-Filippu
VITTORIOSA
Triq T. Boffa
Il-Habs L-Antik
Kav F. Sciberras
Xatt Il-Forn
Triq San Lawrenz
Triq Xandru
Dahla tat-Tarzna
Triq It-Tarzna
F. Azzopardi
Xatt Juan B. Azopardo
SENGLEA
Triq Iz-Zewg Mini
Settembru
Triq Il-Ponta
Triq Il-Vitorja
Kurcifiss
Ir-Rampa Ta' L-Isla
Fuq San L-Infurmazzjoni
Triq Il-Gendus
Triq L-Oratorju
Triq San Pawl
1 Three Gates
2 Malta at War Museum
3 Inquisitor's Palace
4 Poste de Castille
5 Café du Brazil
6 Sacra Infermeria
7 Bighi Sally Port
8 Il–Collachio
9 Church of St Lawrence
10 Malta Maritime Museum
11 Fort St Angelo
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**Vittoriosa, along with Senglea and Cospicua, make up Malta's 'Three Cities'**—a generic name for the intertwining medieval communities that weave across two thin peninsulas on the south side of the Grand Harbour. The city's handful of historic attractions can be explored in a day and, with an early start, it's possible also to take in nearby Senglea. There are no accommodation options here and little in the way of shops, but you'll find that it is well worth lingering into the evening to experience Vittoriosa's fine wine bars and excellent waterfront restaurants. From Valletta catch buses 1, 2, 4 or 6 and from Sliema and Buġibba take 627 to Vittoriosa's small bus terminal.

**1 Three Gates.** On leaving Vittoriosa's bus terminal turn left and walk a short way downhill before turning right and entering the city the old way – via its ancient Three Gates (signposted to the Malta at War Museum). The first Advanced Gate was built in 1722 and leads through a courtyard to the Couvre Port and Main Gate from where you'll emerge onto Triq il-Mina l-Kbira.

**2 ★★ kids Malta at War Museum,** *see p 55, bullet 4*.

**3 ★★ Inquisitor's Palace.** Following a brief stint as the Knights' law courts, this evocative palace served as the headquarters of Malta's Inquisition from 1574 until 1798. Visitors are invited to wander at will through the palace's many parts, whose highlights include the room where people waited to face the Inquisition, graffiti filled prison cells and a tranquil central courtyard. 🕘 *45 min. Triq il-Mina l-Kbira.* ☎ *2182 7006. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 4.66€ adults, 1.16€ children. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm. Free guided tours at 2pm.*

*View of Kalkara Harbour from Vittoriosa.*

**4 Poste de Castille.** It was at this scenic vantage point overlooking Kalkara Harbour, that Grand Master Valette was injured during the Great Siege. An interpretive board brings to life this historic event and shaded benches provide a quick rest stop.

## Museum Closure

Although signposts still point the way to the Vittoriosa 1565 Museum, it no longer exists. At the time of writing proposals are being submitted to turn the building into a wine bar.

## Vittoriosa Multi-site Ticket

Joint tickets for entrance to the Inquisitor's Palace and Malta Maritime Museum can be bought at either attraction for 6.99€.

### Take a Break

5 **Café du Brazil.** Tuck into enormous Maltese bruschettas and other traditional light meals while watching the world cruise by at this pavement café that's popular with the locals. *1 Misrħ Ir-Rebħ. No phone. $.*

6 **Sacra Infermeria.** This large convent was once the first hospital built by the Knights in Malta (Triq Santa Skolastika; not open to the public). On the waterfront side of the convent, steps lead down to the sea at 7 **Bighi Sally Port.** This guarded entry to Vittoriosa allowed the Knights access to small boats when the city was under attack during the Great Siege and enabled their injured to be smuggled in at night and treated at the Sacra Infermeria.

8 ★★★ **Il-Collachio.** The highlight of any visit to Vittoriosa is getting lost in its Il-Collachio district. These ancient narrow plant-filled streets were once home to the Knights and are littered with their old Auberges. Marble plagues identify those buildings that survived WWII bombing raids, such as the old English Auberge on Triq il-Majjistral, now a library. Another highlight of this historic region is the Norman House on Triq it-Tramuntana, which dates back to the 13th century.

*The Norman House, Il-Collachio, Vittoriosa.*

*Fort St Angelo, Vittoriosa.*

**9 ★ Church of St Lawrence.** At the time of writing this majestic church was undergoing restoration, but I did manage to gain entrance and marvel at its ornate splendour. The original medieval church that once stood on this elevated spot overlooking the harbour is believed to date back to 1090, making St Lawrence one of Malta's oldest churches. The Knights made St Lawrence their conventual church in 1530 and the present building was redesigned in the late 17th century. Don't miss Mattia Preti's magnificent altarpiece depicting the martyrdom of St Lawrence—the artist's largest ever painting. ***Xatt Ir-Risq.***

**10 ★ Malta Maritime Museum.** Vittoriosa's waterfront is a fitting location for a museum dedicated to Malta's rich seafaring history from the Knights' naval battles onwards. This fascinating museum is housed in the former British naval bakery and visitors are invited to pour over sea charts, log books, photographs and incredible old compasses, while detailed models bring the ships of old to life. ***30 min. Ix-Xatt Tal-Birgu. 2166 0052. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 4.66€ adults, 1.16€ children. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm.***

**11 Fort St Angelo.** Some believe that the fortification of this ancient

## Auberge

A number of old properties in Vittoriosa and Valletta are referred as being an old Auberge of the Knights of St John. Each langue (regional group) of the Order had its own Auberge that served as both an inn where the Knights stayed and their headquarters.

## Water Taxis

From Vittoriosa's waterfront catch a water taxi either to Senglea to continue this tour (2€ per person), or back to Valletta (4€ per person). See p 162 for more information on Water Taxis and make sure you have the right change for the fare.

site at the tip of Vittoriosa's peninsula dates back to at least Roman times. When the Knights assumed control, the impressive fort they constructed served as the residence of their Grand Master during the Order's residence in Vittoriosa. Due to ongoing restoration work no unauthorised entry is currently allowed, however, you can still walk up to the old gate on St Angelo's Wharf and spy long silent cannons poking out of disused battlements.

Once known as L-Isla, Senglea was built on a grid system in 1551 by Grand Master De La Sengle, after which the city was renamed. WWII bombing raids have left only a couple of sites of historic interest.

*Vedette at Senglea Point.*

**⓬ Vedette at Senglea Point.** Decorated with symbols of watchfulness—an ear, an eye and the crane bird—this quirky sentry box is one of Malta's most iconic sites. From its elevated position on the tip of the city's bastions, the watchtower has an uninterrupted view of the harbour and was constructed to assure the city's residents that they can relax in their beds at night, safe in the knowledge that it's constantly on the look out for hostile forces. *Triq iż-Żewġ Mini.*

**⓭ Church of Our Lady of Victory.** The parish church of Senglea commemorates the Knights' victory following the Great Siege and was another casualty of WWII raids. The church was completely rebuilt following the war and a monument dedicated to those who died during bombing raids stands in front of its modest façade. Inside a statue of Christ the Redeemer is believed by many to possess miraculous healing powers, making Our Lady of Victory an importance place of pilgrimage. *Misraħ Papa Benedittu XV.*

### Travel

Catch bus 3 back to Valletta from the stop opposite the Church of Our Lady of Victory. This bus runs every half hour until 9.30pm.

# Where to **Drink & Dine**

Most of Vittoriosa's restaurants and wine bars are concentrated around the city's waterfront marina between the Malta Maritime Museum and Fort St Angelo. Those tucked away in Vittoriosa's narrow streets are mainly only open in the evening.

★★ **Del Borgo** *WINE BAR* One of my favourite wine bars, the swish Del Borgo is moments from Vittoriosa's city gates. Chilled out ambience fuses with the city's flare for history, all complemented by fine wine and first class Mediterranean food. ***Triq it-Torri ta'San Gwann. ☎ 2180 3710. Mains 7–15€. MC, V. Open daily from 6pm.***

★ **Don Berto** *MODERN MEDITERRANEAN* Set high into the walls above Vittoriosa's waterfront this upmarket, chic restaurant claims sweeping harbour views. This is the choice for a special night out and the menu features a good range of fish dishes and excellent wine selection. ***Birgu Waterfront. ☎ 2180 8008. Mains 10–22€. AE, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

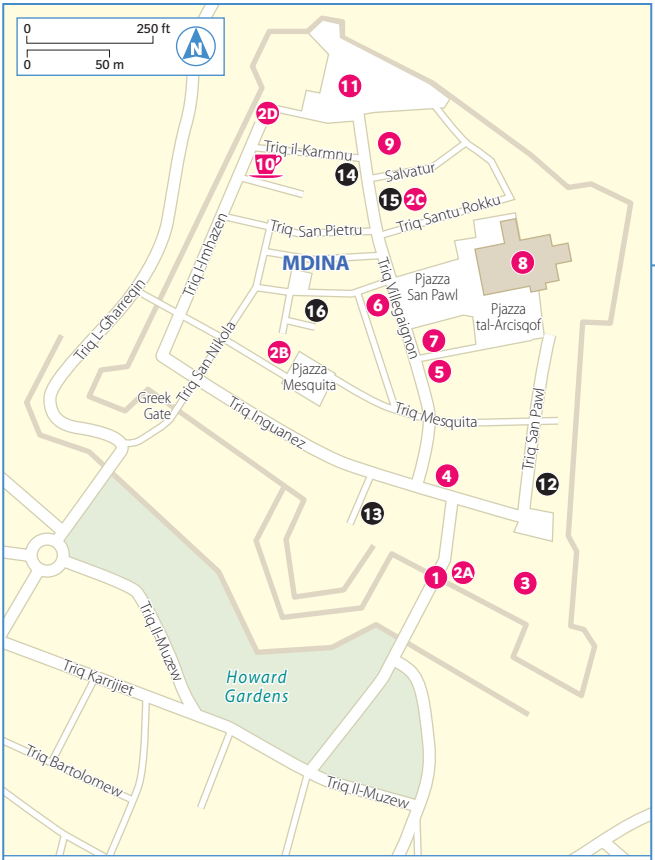
★★ **il-Forn** *WINE BAR* A fun and funky wine bar and art gallery housed in a former 17th century bakery in the heart of Il-Collachio. Bubbly and colourful art crowds in on all sides while you choose from around 80 local and international wines and light Mediterranean meals. ***Triq it-Tramuntana. ☎ 2182 0379. Mains 6–12€ MC, V. Tues–Sun 7.30pm–1am.***

★ **Two and a Half Lemon** *MODERN MEDITERRANEAN* Vittoriosa's old Treasury Building has been transformed into its trendiest restaurant. Shades of the building's past add an extra twist to the imaginative meat and fish dishes that fill the menu. Both good food and views of the marina can be lingered over. Evening reservations recommended. ***Birgu Waterfront. ☎ 2180 9909. Mains 14–22€ AE, MC, V. Lunch and dinner daily.***

## The Knights of St John in Vittoriosa

When the sea-faring Knights arrived in Malta in 1530 they rejected the island's land locked capital Mdina as their base and chose instead the Grand Harbour—believing it easier to defend the island from this vantage point. The Knights built property in Vittoriosa, then called Birgu, and expanded its defences in preparation for an imminent Turkish attack. It was from this stronghold that the Knights withstood the force of the Ottoman Empire during the Great Siege of 1565 (see p 121). Following their triumph, the city was renamed Vittoriosa—Victorious—although it is still often referred to by its old name. The Order lived in Vittoriosa until 1571 when they triumphantly relocated to the newly built Valletta.

# Mdina




1. Main Gate
2. Mdina's Multimedia Mini Tour (see 2A-2D)
3. National Museum of Natural History
4. St Agatha's Chapel
5. Casa Testaferrata
6. House of Notary Bezzina
7. Banca Giuratale
8. St Paul's Cathedral & Cathedral Museum
9. Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum
10. Ciappetti
11. Pjazza tas-Sur

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**Mdina's Multimedia Mini Tour**

2A Mdina Dungeons
2B Mdina Experience
2C Medieval Times
2D The Knights of Malta

**Malta's medieval history at its most tangible can be experienced within the narrow streets of the citadel of Mdina.** Circled by an imposing fortified wall, Mdina is Malta's oldest city—its history dates back to at least 1000 BC when the Phoenicians established a settlement here. The tiny Mdina served as Malta's capital until the construction of Valletta and it can be easily discovered in a day. Quiet back lanes provide relief from the influx of day trippers; however, if you can, visit at night when Mdina's streets once again echo with the silence for which this city is famous. From Valletta take bus 80 or 81, from Sliema bus 65 and from Buġibba bus 86 to the bus terminal just south of Rabat's Howard Gardens.

**1 Main Gate.** Enter Mdina by crossing the stone bridge that leads from Rabat's Howard Gardens (see p 45, bullet 5) to the city's fine Baroque Main Gate. This recently restored grand entrance was constructed in 1724 and bears the coat of arms of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena (a lion and a sword) on its external façade. Mdina's original gate once stood a few metres to the right—you can still see its outline in the city wall.

**2 Mdina's Multimedia Mini Tour.** To date the Silent City has four multimedia attractions that attempt, some more successfully than others, to bring Mdina's rich history to life. For most visitors the city's ancient streets themselves are sufficient to evoke Mdina's past, but those with children might appreciate it being jazzed up by these attractions.

*Mdina's Main Gate.*

## Karrozzin

Karrozzin are traditional horse drawn carriages, and although they are popular with visitors in Valletta, Mdina is a much more romantic setting to hop aboard. These much prized carriages have been transporting people around the island since the mid-19th century and you can catch a ride just outside Mdina's Main Gate. A 45 minute tour of both Mdina and Rabat in a karrozzin costs 35€ for a maximum of four people.

*National Museum of Natural History, Mdina.*

**2A Mdina Dungeons,** *see p 51, bullet 9.*

**2B ★ Mdina Experience,** *see p 51, bullet 10.*

**2C Medieval Times.** This series of tableaux recounting the history of Mdina in the 14th and 15th centuries starts with medieval builders constructing the city and takes in family and street life. 🕘 *15 min. Triq Villegaignon.* ☎ *2145 4625. Admission 4.66€ adults, 2.33€ children. Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm.*

*Triq Villegaignon, Mdina.*

**2D The Knights of Malta.** Housed in old gunpowder vaults in Mdina's battlements, this attraction recreates the history of the Knights of St John and consists of two parts—a 20 minute long audio visual show and a succession of walk through tableaux. 🕘 *30 min. Casa Magazzini, Triq i-Imħaħen.* ☎ *2145 1342. www.theknightsofmalta.com. Admission 5.25€ adults, 2.63€ children. Mon–Fri 10.30am–4.00pm, Sat 10.30am–3pm.*

Just past the Mdina Dungeons, a courtyard leading to the Palazzo de Vilhena opens up to the right. The palazzo was built in 1724 and originally served as a summer residence for the Knights' Grand Master. From 1860 to 1956 it was granted a new lease of life as a hospital and today this resplendent building houses the National Museum of Natural History.

**3 National Museum of Natural History.** Take a break from Mdina's medieval past to discover Malta's natural history. The museum contains large collections of stuffed animals including numerous species of birds, plus their nests and eggs, as well as around 200 types of fish and mammals. Geology exhibits explain the history of Malta's landscape and include displays of numerous fossils, rocks and minerals. The squeamish are advised to avoid the insect collections, but ultimately the building itself is the museum's highlight. *45 min. Pjazza San Publiju. 2145 5951. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.*

A short detour right before St Agatha's Chapel leads to Misraħ il-Kunsill where the Corte Capitanale, a former law court stands opposite the luxury Xara Palace hotel (see p 141). It is believed that a secret underground tunnel once connected the court with the archbishop's palace.

**4 St Agatha's Chapel.** Dating back to the early 15th century, this tiny chapel on Triq Villegaignon can be viewed though a small gate—try later in day if the city is crowded with visitors. The chapel is enclosed by the Nunnery of St Benedict, which occupies a complete block of Mdina's main street. The nunnery is not open to the public because the nuns have chosen to live in complete isolation.

**5 Casa Testaferrata** stands on the right hand side of Triq Villegaignon just past St Agatha's chapel. The Maltese aristocracy owns this large building, however, historians believe that a temple dedicated to Apollo stood here in Roman times. ***Not open to the public.***

## St Agatha

Martyred in around 250 AD, Agatha is one of Mdina's three patron saints—the other two are St Paul and St Publius. Various versions of her life story exist, but all agree that she was from Sicily and sought sanctuary in Malta following her rejection of the Sicilian Roman governor's passionate advances. On her return to Sicily, Agatha was imprisoned and her many tortures included having her breasts cut off and numerous representations of this brutal punishment can be found in churches all over Malta. Legend claims that after being sentenced to burn at the stake, an inexplicable earthquake saved Agatha from the flames, although she later died in prison. Agatha is patron saint in Malta because it is believed that her divine intervention once saved the island from a Turkish invasion.

*Balcony, House of Notary Bezzina.*

**6 The House of Notary Bezzina** is found further along Triq Villegaignon on the left hand side. It was from this building's detailed balcony that Mdina's citizens threw the island's French commander to his death in a 1798 uprising. ***Not open to the public.***

**7 The Banca Giuratale** is on the right side of Triq Villegaignon just before the Pjazza San Pawl. It was here that a national assembly formed to consult with Lord Nelson against the French. Today the building serves as the National Archives and the public are allowed free entrance into its lobby where you can view a photo portrait exhibition depicting the great and good of Maltese society and a smattering of historic documents housed in glass cases.

**8 ★★ St Paul's Cathedral & Cathedral Museum,** *see p 41, bullet 5.*

**9 ★★★ kids Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum,** *see p 36, bullet 10.*

### Take a Break

**10 ★★ Ciappetti.** Huddled away in a narrow back street, this rustic restaurant dishes up excellent pasta, salads and other light meals on a romantic, vine-smothered terrace. Home grown herbs add extra zing to the food. ***5 St Agatha's Esplanade. ☎ 2145 9987. $–$$.***

**11 Pjazza tas-Sur.** As Triq Villegaignon meets the north side of Mdina's city walls, it opens out into this charming square. Here visitors can linger over fabulous views across north and central Malta—St Paul's Bay can be spied straight ahead, while to the east you can catch sight of the Three Cities. The niches strewn along the city's ramparts are a good place to take a quick rest.

From the Pjazza tas-Sur take time to wander through Mdina's exceptionally narrow back streets—you can practically stand in the middle and

touch the buildings on either side. Few visitors peel away from the city's main sights to explore these atmospheric alleyways that provide a flavour of how the city might have felt in medieval times.

Exit Mdina through its little used Greek's Gate. Named after the city's small Greek colony, this modest gate tunnels its way through Mdina's city wall and emerges on the west side of Rabat's Howard Gardens. Those that are also taking in Rabat in the same day can head straight through the gardens to Triq San Pawl and onto the Rabat's main sights. And those that are catching a bus can turn left to head back to the bus terminus.

# Where to **Stay & Dine**

★ **Bacchus** *MEDITERRANEAN/MALTESE* Almost hidden in one of Mdina's quiet back streets, Bacchus is an old vaulted restaurant that serves a thick slice of historic surroundings and fine dining in equal measures. ***Triq Inguanez. ☎ 2145 4981. Mains 8–15€. AE, MC, V. Open daily lunch and dinner.***

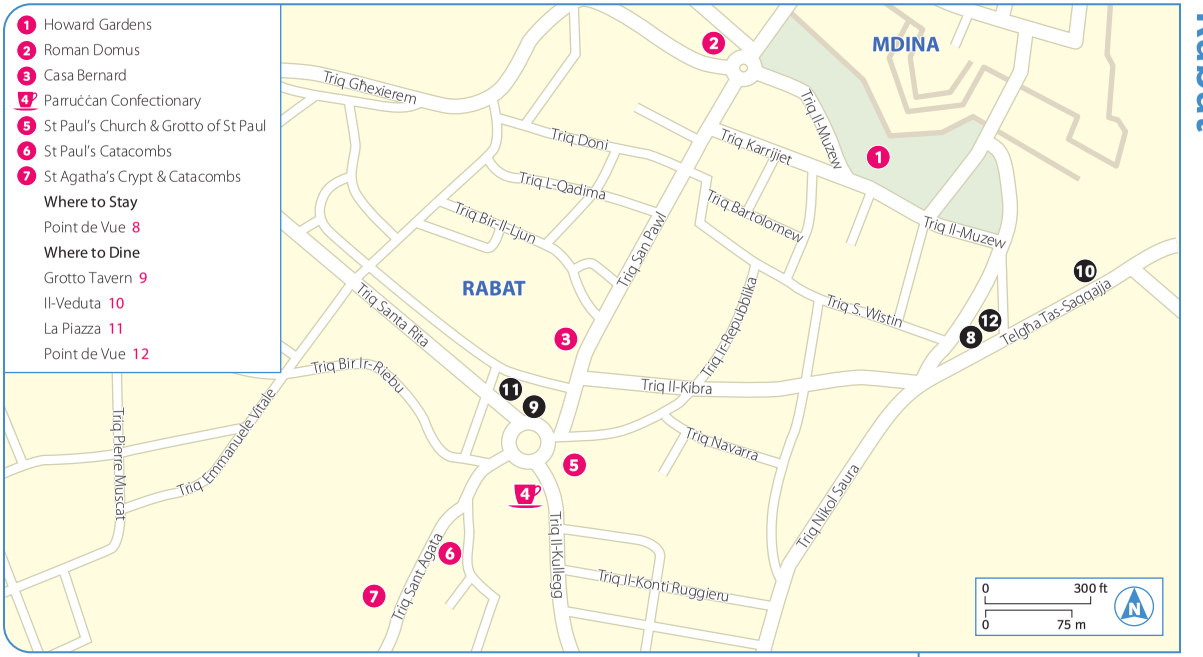
★★ **Il-Gattopardo** *GREEK* Mainly Greek influenced light meals are served in a charming, intimate old courtyard or inside what was once a Mdina townhouse. The café also serves as an art gallery and its walls are graced with changing exhibitions from local artists. ***20 Triq Villegaigon. ☎ 2145 1213. Mains 4–8€. MC, V. Lunch Mon–Sat, dinner Fri and Sat, summer only.***

**Palazzo Costanzo** *CAFÉ* Attached to the Medieval Times multimedia attraction, this basic café dishes up fast, no nonsense lunch time pizzas, pastas, platters and sandwiches in Baroque surroundings. ***Triq Villegaignon ☎ 2145 4625. DC, MC, V. Mains 4–7€. Lunch Mon–Sat, dinner Sat.***

★★★ **The Medina** *MEDITERRANEAN/MALTESE* Set in a medieval townhouse that has lost none of charm, The Medina is one of Malta's most romantic restaurants. An elegant courtyard decorated with a pink oleander tree is perfect for summer dining, while in winter log fires crackle in an arched inside restaurant. This is the place for a candlelit special night out. ***7 Triq is-Salib Imqaddes. ☎ 2145 4004. DC, MC, V. Mains 18–30€. Dinner Mon–Sat.***

★★★ **Xara Palace** Housed in a restored 17th century palazzo, this five star romantic retreat is one of Malta's most exclusive hotels. Antiques and original artworks fill the interior and a superb roof top restaurant provides sweeping views of the island. ***Misraħ il-Kunsill. ☎ 2145 0560. www.xarapalace.com.mt. 17 rooms and suites. Rooms 185–210 €, suites 275–585€. AE, DC, MC, V.***

# Rabat


1 Howard Gardens
2 Roman Domus
3 Casa Bernard
4 Parruċċan Confectionary
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RABAT
Triq Ghexierem
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Triq San Pawl
Triq Il-Muzew
Triq Santa Rita
Triq Bir Ir-Riebu
Triq Il-Repubblika
Triq S. Wistin
Telgha Tas-Saqqajja
Triq Il-Kibra
Triq Pierre Muscat
Triq Emmanuele Vitale
Triq Navarra
Triq Nikol Saura
Triq Il-Kullegg
Triq Sant Agata
Triq Il-Konti Ruggieru
0 300 ft
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N

**Rabat is a must for any visitor wanting to delve into Malta's Christian history** because the city is home to a high concentration of captivating religious sites, plus numerous churches, monasteries and convents belonging to an array of religious orders. Rabat, from the Arabic for suburb, developed around Mdina's fortifications, but it is far more than a mere adjunct of the old capital. Refreshingly devoid of any tourist trimmings, Rabat may be far larger than the neighbouring walled city, but its maze of streets can still be easily discovered in a day. To reach Rabat by bus, take 80 or 81 from Valletta, 65 from Sliema or 66 from Buġibba to the terminus south of Howard Gardens. From the terminus enter Rabat via Triq San Pawl.

### Museum Closure

At the time of writing the Wignacourt Museum on Triq il-Kulleg is closed for restoration.

**1** kids **Howard Gardens,** *see p 45, bullet* **5**.

**2** ★ **Roman Domus.** The mock Roman building on this site was built in the early 20th century and covers the excavated remains of a large, once sumptuous, Roman townhouse dating back to the 1st century. Its location on the outskirts of Mdina, the capital of Roman Malta, suggests that the villa belonged to someone of high standing. The highlight of what remains is a central courtyard inlaid with an intricate mosaic pavement depicting two birds perched on the edge of a bowl—one of the finest examples of ancient mosaic work in the western Mediterranean. Other artefacts from the Roman period, such as an old olive press and various sculptures, are also on display. 🕘 *30 min. Wesgħa tal-Mużew.* ☎ *2145 4125. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 5.82€ adults, 2.91€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.*

*Roman Domus, Rabat.*

## St Paul—The Patron Saint of Malta

**Originally a known persecutor of the Church, St Paul the apostle** is famous for converting to Christianity on the road to Damascus after being dazzled by a vision of Jesus. Following his dramatic conversion, Paul travelled widely on various missions across Asia Minor, was eventually arrested by the Romans in Jerusalem and, in 60 AD, shipped off to Rome to stand trail. En route to Rome the boat Paul was travelling in was wrecked on the shores of Malta and during his three months stay on the island it is believed Paul lived in a grotto in Rabat (see p 40, bullet 4). After curing the Roman governor Publius' father of fever, Paul converted the governor and ordained him as a bishop. In doing so he ushered Christianity into Malta—a feat that earned him the status of Malta's patron saint. Paul eventually continued his journey to Rome via Sicily where he was most probably martyred sometime during the reign of emperor Nero (64–67 AD).

3 ★★ **Casa Bernard.** This beautifully preserved 16th century palazzo is just strides away from the Roman Domus and still inhabited by a Maltese noble family. The house has Roman foundations and an original late 16th century front door. ***46 Triq San Pawl.***

*St Paul's Church façade, Rabat.*

*St Paul's Catacombs, Rabat.*

Triq San Pawl leads into Rabat's large and busy central square—Misraħ il-Parroċċa. The square is dominated by St Paul's Church and is consistently busy with tourists and locals alike. Misraħ il-Parroċċa is an ideal place to take a break, as a smattering of good places to eat and drink can be found close by.

## Take a Break

4 **Parruċċan Confectionary.** Sweet toothed tourists make a bee line to this colourful confectionary takeaway where you can indulge in traditional Maltese cakes and sweets. *Misraħ il-Parroċċa. ☎ 9947 4460. $.*

5 **St Paul's Church & Grotto of St Paul,** *see p 40, bullet 4*. From Misraħ il-Parroċċa follow Triq Sant'Agata, which leads off the south western end of the square to the catacombs of St Paul and St Agatha.

6 ★ **St Paul's Catacombs.** This weaving maze of underground Roman burial chambers was once isolated on the outskirts of Mdina—according to Roman law, burials were not permitted inside the city's walls. Now engulfed by Rabat's urban streets, the catacombs date back to the beginnings of Christianity in Malta and were in use until the 4th century. Any burial goods are long gone, but don't let this put you off exploring the many atmospheric passageways and burial chambers that sprawl away from a large central hall. *45 min. Triq Sant'Agata. ☎ 2145 4562. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission including a self guided audio tour 4.66€ adults, 1.16€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.*

7 ★★ **St Agatha's Crypt & Catacombs.** St Agatha is believed to have hidden in these subterranean chambers during her time in Malta. Her catacombs are one of the island's earliest Christian burial sites and are worth visiting just to gaze

## Shopping in Rabat

Rabat is a recommended place in central Malta to pick up better than average souvenirs. The Roman Villa Centre stands adjacent to Roman Domus and sells a large range of tourist fare that's neither too tacky nor too expensive. Browse through fine white gold and handmade Maltese filigree work at the Silver Lace Jewellers on Triq San Pawl next door to Casa Bernard, or choose from a selection of good quality gifts at the Empire Arts and Crafts Centre opposite St Paul's Catacombs, which also contains a small café.

upon a series of intricate medieval frescos dating from the 12–15th centuries that still line some of its ancient walls. Visitors are led through the site via regular guided tours, which explain the history as it unfolds before you. Following the tour you can spend as much time as you like pouring over exhibits in the attached museum whose artefacts include collections of fossils, pottery and paintings. 🕘 ***30 min. Triq Sant'Agata. ☎ 2145 4503. Admission 2.05€ adults, 0.50€ children. Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm and Sat 9am–12.30pm. Modest dress required.***

# Where to **Stay & Dine**

★★ **Grotto Tavern** *FRENCH* Experience delicious French cuisine with flair, accompanied by fine wine or a selection of local and international beers in this simple, stone, plant-strewn cellar restaurant. ***Misraħ il-Parroċċa. ☎ 2145 5138. www.grottotavern.com. MC. V. Mains 10–20€. Lunch daily, dinner Tues–Sat.***

**Il-Veduta** *PIZZERIA* Panoramic views over central Malta are served up alongside decent pizzas,

*Grotto Tavern.*

omelettes, salads and pasta dishes on Il-Veduta's al fresco terrace. Children's menu and takeaways also available. ***Il Pjazza ta Saqqajja. ☎ 2145 4666. Mains 6–18€. AE, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

★ **La Piazza** *PIZZERIA/CAFÉ* A busy, friendly no nonsense pizzeria in the heart of Rabat where you can join the locals to munch on morning pastries and light meals at pavement tables or inside on cafeteria style seating. ***Pjazza San Pawl. ☎ 2145 0865. 3–7€. MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

**Point de Vue (Dining)** *CONTINENTAL/AFRICAN* An unexpected African-themed eatery on the border between Mdina and Rabat. Choose between the formal yet colourful Butcher's Grill for restaurant meals with a spicy twist, or the informal Java lounge for the usual pizzas, burgers and salads. ***2–7 Is-Saqqajja. ☎ 2145 4177. Pizzas and pastas 5–9€, restaurant mains 9–23€ AE, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

**Point de Vue (Accommodation)** This small, family run guesthouse dating back to the 17th century sits on the edge of Howard Gardens and is convenient for both Rabat and Mdina. The basic but spotless rooms have fine views over either the Silent City or surrounding countryside. ***2–7 Is-Saqqajja. ☎ 2145 4177. www.pointdevuemalta.com. 12 rooms. 40€ per double room w/breakfast. AE, MC, V.***

*Point de Vue.*

## Ta'Qali National Stadium

Built in 1980 and located a few miles north east of Rabat, the 17,000 seater Ta'Qali National Stadium is the home ground of Valletta FC and hosts all of Malta's international football matches. In this ground, Malta has defeated Iceland, Hungary, Bosnia and Azerbaijan, while losing close games to England, Italy and West Germany. The Valletta FC's 5-4 defeat of Italian giants Juventus in a friendly match on 9 January 2008, along with Birkirkara FC's 5-0 loss to AC Milan a year earlier, both stand out as matches to remember in the stadium's history. The stadium also houses, the Malta Football Association, which was founded in 1900 and became an affiliate of FIFA in 1959 and EUEFA in 1960. In January 2009, the Maltese men's team were ranked 148th in the world, above Turkmenistan and below St Vincent and the Grenadines, while the women were ranked 99th, above Ethiopia, but below Samoa.

# Victoria & the Citadel

**Known locally as Rabat, Victoria is Gozo's capital and home** to all the island's main amenities and shops. The biggest attraction in town is the Citadel—an ancient fortified city first built by the Romans, which sits on a dramatic ridge over looking Victoria and the rest of the island. Expect to spend a couple of hours here exploring Gozo's magnificent cathedral, numerous museums and the traffic-free medieval streets that make up this tiny city within a city. Victoria's busy urban streets, dotted with café-filled squares, engulf the Citadel and attract less visitor attention. Here you can blend into local life while enjoying the town's old quarter—il-Borgo—the splendid Basilica of St George and numerous wine bars and fine restaurants. There are, however, few accommodation options in town as most visitors opt to stay in one of Gozo's coastal towns or inland villages.

## Travel

Victoria's bus terminus on Triq Putirjal is centrally located and receives buses from all over the island. Bus 25 runs a regular service between Victoria and Mġarr Harbour, where it meets the ferries from Malta. Victoria's main car park is located next to the bus terminus. Further parking can be found on Pjazza San Franġisk.

## Rabat

Victoria is the old suburb (Rabat in Arabic) of the Citadel but was renamed in 1897 in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

1 **Rundle Gardens,** *see p 47, bullet 10*.

*Daily market, Pjazza Indipendenza, Victoria.*

*Ta'Rikardu, the Citadel.*

**2 Aurora Opera House.** Take time to pop inside the foyer and up the staircase of this grand, if slightly faded, still working theatre. The ground floor is home to the Aurora Band Club, a large café crammed with well used snooker tables. ***Triq Repubblika.***

**3 Teatru Astra.** Victoria's other working theatre, the Astra is Malta's largest Baroque theatre and stands within shouting distance of the Aurora. Enter through a classical Greek style portico into the theatre's ornate foyer from which twin staircases sweep up to the balcony. ***Triq Repubblika.***

**4 ★ Pjazza Indipendenza.** Also known as it-Tokk, this large central square hosts a daily tourist market and contains several open air cafés, which are always busy with both visitors and locals absorbing the sights and atmosphere of the city. The square is overlooked by the circular Banca Giuratale building, which was built in the early 18th century and is home to Victoria's local council.

**5 Gozo 360°,** *see p 51, bullet 12*. From Gozo 360° it's a short steep walk up Telgħa Tal-Belt to the Citadel's Main Gate, which you pass through to enter into the old city.

## Take a Break

**6 Cittadella.** Pause on the road to the Citadel for a quick sandwich or coffee at this pretty courtyard restaurant. *14/16 Telgħa Tal-Belt.* ☎ *2156 2062. $.*

**7 ★★★ Cathedral of the Assumption & Cathedral Museum.** *See p 42, bullet 10.*

**8 ★ Museum of Archaeology.** Visitors are led through the history of Gozo from the Neolithic period to the medieval era. There's plenty to take in such as a selection of early Roman jars, a beautiful glass funerary urn from the 1st or 2nd century and a detailed artist's impression of the Citadel in the 16th century. Also of interest is a model

## Citadel Gozo Multi-site Ticket

A multi ticket allowing entry to the Citadel's four Heritage Malta museums can be purchased for 4.66€ at any of the museums.

of, and artefacts from, Gozo's Ġgantija Temples (see p 31, bullet 9). The building itself dates back to the 17th century and, as the Citadel's old Town Hall, was once the venue where the Knights welcomed important guests. 🕘 ***30 min. Triq Bieb il-Mdina. ☎ 2155 6144. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.***

From the Museum of Archaeology take a quick detour along Triq Bieb l-Mdina to see five old bells from Gozo's Cathedral of the Assumption, which were cast at Ferreria—the Knights' old foundry in Valletta ***(see p 121)***, and now hang in the Citadel's wall just past a small row of shops.

*Natural Science Museum, the Citadel.*

## Take a Break

9 ★★ **Ta'Rikardu.** Experience delicious platters of traditional Gozitan cheeses, hearty home made soups and superb pasta in rustic surrounds. Dine at midday and hear the cathedral bells chime through this charming old building. ***4 Triq il-Fosos. ☎ 21555053. $.***

*Street shrine in Victoria.*

10 ★ **Museum of Folklore.** Meander through a labyrinth of old medieval stone rooms filled with everyday artefacts from Gozo's working history. Collections include agricultural tools, traditional lace making, weaving looms and Maltese figurines. A limited number of interpretative boards explain the artefacts on show. 🕘 ***30 min. Triq Bernardo de Opuo. ☎ 2156 2034. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.***

On leaving the Museum of Folklore, continue along Triq Bernardo de Opuo to reach a collection of ruins and the old medieval walls from where expansive views of Gozo spread out before you.

## Where to Shop in the Citadel

A line of small traditional shops, including lace and candle makers, can be found along Triq Bieb l-Mdina just past the Museum of Archaeology. Ta'Rikardu on Triq il-Fossos sells a range of traditional arts and crafts including glass and pottery, plus an array of excellent local foods, such as cheese, honey and wine.

**11 Natural Science Museum.** Displays of marine life including coral, shells and fish, local flora, fauna and geology fill this lovely old building, which has previously been used as an inn and a WWII shelter. The museum's star exhibit is a tiny chunk of rock from the moon's surface—a gift from President Nixon. Ultimately, however, this museum is one for science enthusiasts. 🕘 *20 min. Triq il-Kwartier.* ☎ *2155 6153. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.*

**12 ★ The Old Prison.** Standing adjacent to the law courts and dating back to 1548, the Old Prison's most interesting features (especially for children) are its tiny, dark cells. The walls are smothered in centuries-old graffiti of ships, names, dates and games, all carved by past inmates—a handprint with a cross inside symbolises a Christian prisoner. The prison's most famous ex inmate is Valetta himself, who, in the days before he was Grand Master, had an outburst of 'aggressive behaviour' punished with a short prison sentence. 🕘 *20 min. Misraħ il-Katidral.* ☎ *2156 5988. www.heritagemalta.org. Admission 2.33€ adults, 0.58€ children. Daily 9am–5pm.*

From the Old Prison, exit the Citadel via its Old Main Gate, which stands to the left of the current Main Gate and features a Roman inscription from the 2nd century on its inside wall.

## Shopping in Victoria

The daily open air market on Pjazza Indipendenza is the place to pick up reasonably priced souvenirs, but also make time to browse through the shops clustered along Il-Borgo's narrow lanes. In this area, Organika (located next door to the Grapes Wine Bar, see p 43) stocks locally made toiletries, organic wine and sea salt straight from Marsalforn's salt pans (no credit cards). On Triq Repubblika you'll find Bookworm, which sells a wide range of local books and maps, and two indoor shopping arcades—Tiġrija Palazz is located next door to Bookworm and the larger Arkadia Shopping Centre near Rundle Gardens includes a good supermarket.

*Pjazza San Franġisk at night, Victoria.*

⓭ ★★ **Basilica of St George.** *See p 43, bullet* ⓫.

⓮ ★★ **Il Borgo.** A web of historic lanes overlooked by old Baroque townhouses, radiate out from Pjazza San Ġorġ, the square in front of the Basilica. These atmospheric streets, dotted with carved catholic icons, form the ancient heart of Victoria and are a delight to simply meander through and get lost in—although this district is so small it's impossible to lose your way completely. If you're visiting in the evening, pause in front of the convent close to the Basilica as you're likely to hear evensong voices drifting out through the lanes.

⓯ **Pjazza San Franġisk.** Few tourists venture this far away from Triq Repubblika, Victoria's main street, but this charming pjazza is one of my favourite parts of the city. The bars and cafés here are buzzing with locals well into the evening and after dark, like most Maltese churches, the striking St Francis on the east side of the square is illuminated by strings of lights.

From Pjazza San Franġisk it's a short walk along Triq Putirjal back to the bus station and car park.

## Time to Unwind

The owners of Victoria's Freespirit Day Spa escaped the pressures of corporate life to train as Natural Therapists and are now in the business of offering serious relaxation and pampering to locals and visitors. Martin, an English man, met Gozitan Monica while training to be a therapist in Australia. This chance meeting saw the pair return to Monica's home island to set up this delightful spa.The many treatments they offer include such delights as 'Too much fun in the sun' facials, 'pinch my extra inch' body wraps and top to toe Polynesian body treatments. *Freespirit Day Spa, Antonio Mallia Street.* ☎ *2156 4797. www.freespirit.com.mt. Treatments cost 35–128€.* Email info@freespirit.com.mt in advance for a brochure and book as far ahead as possible.

## Victoria's Nightlife

The Aurora Opera House *(☎ 2156 6256)* and Teatru Astra *(☎ 2155 6256)* on Triq ir-Repubblika both run a regular programme of excellent opera, drama, ballet and other events. The Tourist Information Office in Victoria (see p 166) has full details of what's on or check local newspapers. And the two screen Citadel Cinema *(Telgħa Tal-Belt, ☎ 2155 9955 www.citadelcinema.com)* is the place to catch mainstream films.

# Where to **Stay & Dine**

★ kids **Downtown Hotel** This modern three star hotel, moments from the centre of Victoria, is the best accommodation in town. Rooms feature all mod cons and the roof top splash pool comes with a sundeck and bird-eye views of the citadel. ***Triq i-Ewropa. ☎ 2210 8000. www.downtown.com.mt. 40 rooms. 24–40€ per person per night w/breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.***

★ **Café Jubilee** *WINE BAR* A long time local institution, this welcoming café and wine bar is one of my favourite places to down a glass of local wine and tuck into fresh ftira and delicious pizza. Choose between the intimate inside café or outdoor seating on Victoria's bustling central pjazza. ***Pjazza Indipendenza. ☎ 2155 8921. DC, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

★★★ **Il-Panzier** *SICILIAN* Dine on high quality traditional Sicilian cuisine in a rustic, romantic courtyard nestled in the heart of Victoria's Il Borgo district. The menu includes a superb choice of wine, a small selection of vegetarian dishes and to die for homemade ice cream. Evening reservations recommended. ***Triq il-Karita. ☎ 2155 9979. Mains 15–20€. AE, MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.***

★★ **It-Tmun** *MEDITERRANEAN* Tucked into a quiet back street far from the tourist soaked centre of town, this excellent restaurant is well-known for imaginative continental cuisine prepared with flare. Book ahead for an evening table. ***Triq i-Ewropa. ☎ 2156 6667. Mains 7–20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Dinner Mon–Wed and Fri–Sat, lunch Sun.***

★ **Palazzo Antonin** *WINE BAR* Rich with flock wallpaper and satin upholstery this friendly, upmarket wine bar serves first class vino—minus a high price tag—alongside wine friendly platters and a substantial range of pasta, pizza and salads. ***Pjazza Indipendenza. ☎ 2155 2386. Mains 5–9€. MC, V. Daily lunch and dinner.*** ●

# The
# Savvy Traveler

# Before You Go

## Government Tourist Offices

**In the UK:** Malta Tourist Office, Unit C, Park House, 14 Northfields, London, SW18 1DD ☎ 020 7292 4900; email: office.uk@visitmalta.com.
**In North America:** Malta Tourist Office, 65 Broadway Suite 823, New York, NY 10006 ☎ 212 430 3799; email office.us@visitmalta.com.
**In Australia:** 403 George Street, Sydney, NSW 2000 ☎ 02 9321 9154; email office.au@visitmalta.com.

## Useful Websites

The Official Tourism website for Malta is **www.visitmalta.com**. Also check **www.aboutmalta.com** and **www.malteseislands.com** for lots of useful information and **www.searchmalta.com** for, among other things, accommodation and events listings. **www.starwebmalta.com** is good for eating out, shopping and entertainment, and for more information on Gozo see **www.gozo.com**. The latest local news can be gleaned from **www.maltamedia.com**.

## VISA Information

Entry visas are not required for stays of less than three months by anyone holding a passport from other European Union countries including the UK, some Commonwealth countries including Australia, Canada and New Zealand and some non-European countries including Japan and the USA. For full information on visas and entry into Malta, check the website of Malta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs **www.foreign.gov.mt** well in advance of your visit.

## The Best Time to Go

Malta has distinct high and low seasons. High season lasts from April to October and at this time both temperatures and accommodation prices are high and it's essential to book somewhere to stay in advance of your visit. Low season lasts from November to March and, if you don't mind the weather being on the chilly side, it's possible to bag a bargain as accommodation rates, along with the number of visitors, drop drastically during these months—rates are often even cheaper if you plan to stay for a while. Main tourist hot spots and sights are much quieter in low season, but some hotels do close altogether and selected restaurants open on fewer evenings. Despite falling in the middle of the low season, Christmas and New Year are generally regarded as high season and you can expect correspondingly higher rates at this time of year.

## Public Holidays

Malta has 14 public holidays. On these days museums and most shops are closed.

New Year's Day—1 January
St Paul's Shipwreck—10 February
St Joseph's Day—19 March
Good Friday—March/April
Freedom Day—31 March
Labour Day—1 May
Sette Giugno—7 June
St Peter & St Paul—29 June
The Assumption (St Mary)—15 August
Victory Day (Nativity of the Virgin Mary)—8 September
Independence Day—21 September
Immaculate Conception—8 December
Republic Day—13 December
Christmas Day—25 December

## Festivals & Special Events

Malta hosts a number of events throughout the year, all of which are family friendly.

# Village Festas

Malta's events calendar is punctuated with a host of village festas—feast days that date back to the 16th century. The family-friendly festivities that accompany these popular events often last five days and are brilliant opportunities to experience village life on the islands and have some fun. Celebrations kick off with the triduum—three days of prayer before the eve of the feast. During this time vespers is sung in the church and brass bands play marches along the village streets, which are decorated with banners, strings of lights and ornamental poles. On the eve of the feast, following morning mass, a colourful firework display, known as 'migmifogu', lights up the evening. Then on the feast day itself, mass takes place during the day and in the evening a procession carrying a statue of the patron saint shoulder high through the streets is accompanied by a brass band, confetti and fireworks. Feast Days take place throughout the year, with the highest concentration falling between June and October. Pick up a leaflet called Village Festas in Malta from tourist information or see www.visitmalta.com/village-festas for a full programme of dates.

## Religious Festivals:

**Carnival.** The week before lent is carnival week and celebrated throughout the islands with parades of floats, fancy dress and general revelry.

**Holy Week & Easter.** Holy week events start with a procession of a statue of Our Lady of Sorrows through Valletta and numerous other communities on the week before Good Friday. A sombre tone prevails on Good Friday when re-enactments and parades representing the Stations of the Cross take place. However, happy celebrations and processions fill Easter Sunday.

**Christmas.** This important festival is much celebrated on the island and churches and cathedrals are adorned with nativity scenes and much finery. Candle-lit carol services and midnight mass on Christmas Eve are held in most churches.

## Other Festivals and Events:

**Malta Fireworks Festival.** The Maltese love fireworks and this four day festival held at the end of April or beginning of May is the chance to enjoy music, entertainment and fireworks at their best.

**National Folk Singing Festival.** Floriana's Argotti gardens come alive with local and Mediterranean folk songs over a weekend in mid-May.

**Powerboat Grand Prix.** Every June the Grand Harbour hosts a Powerboat P1 World Championships grand prix (www.powerboatp1.com).

**L'Imnarja.** A summer folk and harvest festival held on 29 June, the feast day of St Peter and St Paul at Bushket gardens, near Rabat.

**Malta Arts Festival.** Held in July, this two week long event celebrates theatre, dance, music and art on the island (www.maltaculture.com).

**The Malta Jazz and Rock Festival.** Held over the third weekend of July, this event is crammed with performances by international jazz and rock musicians on a stage beneath Valletta's bastions.

**Malta International Airshow.** A weekend long festival in September of aerial displays and events at Malta airport and St Paul's Bay (www.maltaairshow.com).

**Festival Mediterranea.** An annual October festival on Gozo featuring a host of cultural events (www.mediterranea.com.mt).

**Rolex Middle Sea Race.** An offshore sailing race held in October that takes boats from Marsamxett Harbour around Sicily and back again (www.rolexmiddlesearace.com).

**Malta Military Tattoo.** Each October Malta struts its military stuff with parades at the Malta Fairs and Conventions Centre at Ta'Qali (www.maltamilitarytattoo.org).

For further information on these festivals and other events, including international music concerts that take place on the island in summer, see www.visitmalta.com/events.

## The Weather

Malta has a typical Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and mild, humid winters. Sea temperatures are generally warm from May to October. For an up to date weather forecast ☎ 5004 3848 or see www.maltaweather.com.

## Mobile Phones

Mobile (cell) phone coverage is good all over Malta, but check with your network provider to make sure your phone will work in this country. If you prefer, you can buy a Maltese SIM card for use during your visit; these cost around 10€ and can be topped up via prepaid vouchers that can be bought all over the island. Two companies offer this service Vodafone (www.vodafone.com.mt) and Go Mobile (www.go.com.mt). Outlets for both of these companies are located in the Embassy shopping and cinema complex on Tri Santa Luċja in Valletta. Alternatively mobile phones can be rented from Telecom Electronics in Naxxar (☎ 2137 6050, www.telecom.com.mt) who will also organise delivery and pick up.

## International Dialing Code

Malta's international dialling code is ☎ 00356.

**AVERAGE TEMPERATURE & RAINFALL IN MALTA**

| MONTH | HOURS OF SUNSHINE | RAIN (MM) | MAX TEMP (°C) | MIN TEMP(°C) | SEA TEMP(°C) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| January | 5 | 90 | 15 | 9 | 15 |
| February | 6 | 61 | 15 | 9 | 15 |
| March | 7 | 45 | 17 | 10 | 15 |
| April | 8 | 24 | 19 | 12 | 16 |
| May | 9 | 9 | 23 | 15 | 18 |
| June | 11 | 4 | 27 | 19 | 21 |
| July | 12 | 1 | 30 | 21 | 25 |
| August | 11 | 9 | 30 | 22 | 26 |
| September | 9 | 40 | 28 | 20 | 25 |
| October | 7 | 124 | 24 | 17 | 22 |
| November | 6 | 77 | 20 | 14 | 20 |
| December | 5 | 100 | 17 | 11 | 17 |

# Getting **There**

## By Plane

Malta International Airport (☎ 2124 9600, www.maltairport.com) is located near the village of Luqu, approximately 10km south of Valletta. For flight enquires ☎ 5004 333. The national airline, Air Malta (www.airmalta.com), operates flights between all Europe's major airports, North Africa and Russia.

**From the UK and Ireland:**
Flying time is just over three hours from London. Air Malta (☎ 00800 66 222 111, www.airmalta.com) runs frequent services all year from London Heathrow, London Gatwick, London Stansted, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow airports and additional services from March to October from Liverpool, Bristol and Newcastle airports. British Airways (☎ 8070 850 9850, www.ba.com) operates regular services from London Gatwick and Manchester airports. British Jet (☎ 0800 091 2222, www.britishjet.com) operates a regular service from London Gatwick, and Ryanair (☎ 0871 246 0000, www.ryanair.com) flies from London Luton and Dublin.

**Elsewhere in the world:**
Malta is well served by flights from all the major European cites, but apart from flights to North Africa, the Middle East and Russia, there are no direct services to non-European destinations. Travellers from the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are advised to travel via a large European airport with frequent international services such as London's Gatwick and Heathrow, Rome, Paris or Amsterdam. Call Air Malta's International Call Centre for more information (☎ 00800 66 222 111).

If you are flying from the USA, Air Malta has special agreements with Delta, Northwest and Virgin Atlantic. You can fly out of the USA with these carriers and connect with Air Malta at the appropriate European gateway, using one ticket for the entire journey. See the Air Malta website for more details (www.airmalta.com) and for the USA support centre call ☎ 1 866 357 4155 or email info@worldaviation.com.mt. In addition to the airlines listed above, the following companies also fly to Malta (check websites for full details of schedules and services):

## Carbon Offsetting

An increasing number of travellers are choosing to carbon offset their flights. Although the only real 'green' solution is not to fly at all, carbon offsetting does reduce the negative impact that flying has on the environment. Two companies offer this service: Climate Care (www.climatecare.org.uk) who will calculate your emissions and charge a set fee that's put towards sustainable energy and forest restoration projects, and the Carbon Neutral Company (www.carbonneutral.com) who offer the same service and provide the option to choose where you want your money to be spent.

## Money Saving Tip

**If you aren't travelling via a package tour, book accommodation** in advance of your visit via Internet travel sites or directly online with the hotel or resort where you plan to stay; it's often possible to save a fortune this way. For more information on accommodation in Malta, check the official tourism website (www.visitmalta.com), or these additional sites:

www.holiday-malta.com
www.maltahotel.net
www.malta-hotels.com

- Air Berlin: www.airberlin.com
- Air Finland: www.airfinland.fi
- Air France: www.airfrance.com
- Air One: www.flyairone.it
- Alitalia: www.alitalia.com
- Clickair: www.clickair.com
- Emirates: www.emirates.com
- Germanwings: www.germanwings.com
- JAT Yugoslav Airlines: www.jat.com
- KLM Royal Dutch Airlines: www.klm.com
- Libyan Arab Airlines: www.libyanarabairline.com
- Lufthansa: www.lufthansa.com
- Luxair: www.luxair.lu
- Norwegian Air: www.norwegian.no
- Scandinavian Airlines: www.flysas.com
- Sevenair: www.seven.com.tn
- SN Brussels: www.flysn.com
- Transavia: www.transavia.nl
- Volareweb: www.volareweb.com
- Vueling: www.vueling.com

### By Sea

A year-round fast ferry service runs between Malta and Sicily operated by Virtu Ferries (www.virtuferries.com). On Malta, the ferry terminal is located at the Pinto Wharf close to Valletta, from which services depart for Pozzallo and Catania on Sicily. Check the website for details of schedules and fares.

### By Package Tour

Many visitors to Malta travel via an organised tour that includes a package of flights and accommodation. This is often the cheapest way to travel to Malta and there are plenty of companies in Europe and North America offering these deals. Also check prices via online travel agencies such as the following, because it's possible to grab a bargain:

- Ebookers: www.ebookers.com
- Expedia: www.expedia.com
- Last Minute: www.lastminute.com
- Travel Republic: www.travelrepublic.co.uk
- Travelocity: www.travelocity.com

# Getting **Around**

Malta is approximately 26km wide by 15km long and travelling around takes no time at all. The country's excellent bus service is adequate for most visitors and with parking a problem in many tourist areas, it's preferable to driving. Gozo may be smaller at around 11km wide by 6½ km long, but with less frequent pubic transport, this island can be harder to move around quickly without car. Taxis are widely available throughout both islands and travelling between Malta and Gozo, and the tiny island of Comino, is easy and inexpensive.

## By Bus

Most visitors choose to travel around Malta by bus because the island operates a frequent, far reaching and inexpensive service. Buses run daily from early in the morning until late in the evening and you can pick up timetables at all the bus stations on the island. There is also a night bus service that operates from Paceville to various destinations around the island. Malta's main bus terminus is located just outside of the City Gate in Valletta and if you are travelling around by bus you will find that you travel in and out of this terminus to reach most destinations. However, Sliema, St Julian's and Buġibba are all well connected via direct services to the main tourist sights. Details of all the services on Malta are online at www.atp.com.mt.

One way fares cost between 0.47€ and 1.16€ depending on how far you travel and make sure you have the exact change if possible. If you plan to catch a lot of buses it could work out cheaper to buy a travel card, but do the maths carefully because you need to use a lot of buses to make these tickets worthwhile. Travel cards cost 3.49€ for one day unlimited travel, 9.32€ for three days, 11.65€ for five days and 14€ for seven days. And if you travel with luggage each item costs an extra 0.35€.

A special bus service connects Malta International Airport with the Gozo ferry terminal at Ċirkewwa. This daily service runs regularly from April to October and one way fares cost 5€. See www.gozochannel.com for a full schedule.

On Gozo, the main bus terminus is located at Victoria on Triq Putirjal. Bus 25, which travels between Victoria and Mġarr Harbour where it connects with the ferry, is a frequent service. However, other routes, all of which are circular from the bus terminus in Victoria, are less regular. One way trips throughout the island cost 0.47€ and details of all routes can be found online at www.gozo.gov.mt.

## Flag Down the Bus

**On Malta buses don't automatically stop at every bus stop. So** make sure you flag down the bus you want to travel on, otherwise it might pass by the stop you are waiting at without stopping to pick you up.

## By Car

Relatively few visitors rent cars on Malta because the bus service is so good, however, public transport is less frequent on Gozo, so if you are staying outside of Victoria and don't want to cycle, a car could come in useful. Cars can be taken between the two islands via the Gozo ferry (see below).

A number of international car hire companies operate on Malta including Avis (☎ 2124 6640, www.avis.com.mt), Budget (☎ 2123 3669, www.budget.com) and Hertz (☎ 2131 4636, www.hertz.com.mt). And there are many local companies to choose from: on Malta, SwanSea Enterprises (☎ 2131 3261, www.active-car-hire.com) in Gzira and Wembley (☎ 2137 4141, www.wembleys.net) in St Julian's; and on Gozo, Victoria Garage (☎ 2155 6414, www.victoriagaragegozo.com) in Victoria and Dolmen Garage (☎ 2155 3012, www.dolmengarage.com) in Qala. For a full list of car hire companies in Malta see www.visitmalta.com/car-hire. Make sure your hire includes adequate insurance.

## Driving

Driving in Malta is fine if you are an experienced driver, although I advise that you avoid main towns and cities during rush hours. Driving is on the left hand side of the road and passing is only allowed on the right hand side. At roundabouts vehicles on the right hand side have right of way. The speed limit is 50mph on highways and 30mph in urban areas. It is compulsory for the driver and front seat passenger to wear a seatbelt and the maximum blood-alcohol concentration allowed for drivers is 0.08%. Major roads are generally in good condition, but some minor roads, especially on Gozo, tend to be quite pot-holed.

International and national driving licences are required for hiring cars.

## Breakdown Cover

Your car rental company should provide you with a number to call in case of breakdown. If they don't, hire with another company. On Malta, 24 hour roadside assistance is provided by RMF (☎ 2124 222, www.rmfmalta.com) and MTC (☎ 2133 3033, www.mtctowingmalta.com).

## By Taxi

Taxi fares on Malta and Gozo are set by the government. You can catch a taxi at the airport from a kiosk in the arrivals hall. On Malta there are stands at the City Gate, outside the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta and on Triq il-Wilga in Paceville as well as at bus stations throughout the island. On Gozo, there are taxi stands at Mġarr Harbour and the bus station in Victoria. Airport transfers and taxis can also be booked via your hotel.

Taxi companies on Malta include: Wallace Taxi Service (☎ 9933 8899), Wembley Motors (☎ 2137 4141) and Freephone Taxis (☎ 8007 3770), and typical fares are Sliema to the airport 20€, St Julian's to the Gozo ferry terminal 25€, Slimea to Valletta 12€ and St Julian's to Mosta, Rabat and St Paul's Bay 20€.

Taxi companies on Gozo include: Belmont Garage (☎ 2155 6962) and Victoria Garage (☎ 2155 6414) and typical fares include Mġarr to Victoria 12€, Victoria to Marsalfron 10€, Victoria to Għarb 8€, Victoria to Xlendi 10€ and Victoria to Dwejra 12€.

## By Water Taxi

A&S Water Taxis (☎ 2180 6921, www.maltesewatertaxis.com) operate a fleet of traditional Maltese boats called dgħajsa as a water taxi service around the Grand Harbour. These can be hailed around the

various waterfronts—they often hail you first—and you can expect to pay 4€ per person from Valletta to Vittoriosa, 8€ per person from Vittoriosa to Sliema and 2€ per person from Vittoriosa to Senglea. Have the exact change if possible.

### By Ferry

The Marsamxetto ferry service (☎ 2346 3862) runs between Sliema and Valletta and is a quick and scenic way to travel between the two waterfronts. Crossings take around five minutes and ferries depart from Slimea at 8am and 9am and Valletta at 8.15am and 9.15am and then every half an hour between 10am and 5.30pm Mon–Sat. The service is less frequent on Sundays when the last departure from Slimea is 3.30pm and Valletta 3.45pm. A one-way fare costs 0.90€.

### By Bike

See Chapter 4 on The Great Outdoors, p 70.

# Travel between Gozo & Malta

### By Sea

Gozo Channel (☎ 2158 0435, www.gozochannel.com) runs a frequent and inexpensive ferry service between Mġarr Harbour on Gozo and Ċirkewwa on Malta. Crossings take 25 minutes and ferries run every 45 minutes 7.30am–10pm and approximately every two hours throughout the night: return fare is 4.65€.

### By Air

A regular helicopter service travels between Malta International Airport and Gozo's heliport (☎ 2155 7905), which is located 3km south east of Victoria at Xewkija. From the heliport you can arrange for your hotel to pick you up or call a taxi in advance. The flight takes around 15 minutes and this daily year round service is operated by a subsidiary company of Air Malta. Advance bookings can be made with your travel agency or through Air Malta and you can organise daily return flights including car hire, or sightseeing trips. You can also book on arrival in Malta through Air Malta.

Harbourair operate a daily seaplane service between Valletta's waterfront and Mġarr Harbour on Gozo as well as sightseeing trips over the islands (☎ 2122 8302, www.harbourairmalta.com).

### Travel between Malta/Gozo & Comino

The Comino Hotel (see p 65) operates a regular ferry service between the hotel and Mġarr Harbour on Gozo and Ċirkewwa on Malta. The ferry is free to hotel guests and 8.15€ return fare for non-guests and runs around seven crossings a day April–October. Call the hotel in advance for a schedule (☎ 2152 9821). Alternatively Royal Cruises (☎ 9940 6529, www.welcome.to/comino) run an hourly boat service to the Blue Lagoon from the Marfa Jetty on Malta: return fare is 10€. Or travel via an organised tour with, on Malta, Captain Morgan (☎ 2134 1270, www.captainmorgan.com.mt), Alliance Cruises (☎ 2133 2165, www.alliancecruises.com) or Hera Yacht Cruises (☎ 2133 0583, www.herayachtcruises.com); and on Gozo, Ozzi One Cruises (☎ 2155 8343, www.gozo.com/ozzi1).

# Fast **Facts**

**ATMS** ATMs and exchange bureaux can be found all over the Islands.

**BANKING HOURS** Banks are normally open 8.30am–12.30pm Mon–Fri and up to 11.30am Sat. Some banks/branches work longer hours and summer and winter opening hours may differ.

**BIKE RENTALS** see box on p 68.

**BUSINESS HOURS** Shops are usually open 9am–1pm and 4pm–7pm Mon–Sat. In tourist areas shops may remain open until 10pm and are normally closed on Sundays and public holidays.

**CREDIT CARDS** Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted in most outlets, and American Express and Diners Club are also accepted at major establishments.

**CUSTOMS** If you are travelling outside of the EU, duty free allowance for adults is 200 cigarettes or 100 cigarillos or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco, one litre of spirits, one litre of wine, with 60ml of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette.

**DOCTORS** see hospitals, below.

**ELECTRICITY** 240 volts, single phase, 50 cycles. The 13-amp, three pin, rectangular plugs are used and adapters are easy to find.

**EMBASSIES** Full details of all the embassies in Malta can be found on the website for the Maltese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.foreign.gov.mt).

**USA**, 3rd Floor, Development House, Triq Sant'Anna, Floriana (☎ 2561 4000).

**UK**, Whitehall Mansions, Ix-Xatt Ta'Xbiex, Ta'Xbiex (☎ 2323 0000).

**Australia**, Villa Fiorentina, Rampa Ta'Xbiex, Ta'Xbiex (☎ 2133 8201).

**Canada**, 103 Triq l-Arċisqof, Valletta (☎ 2552 3233).

**EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE** Police ☎ 191, Ambulance ☎ 196, Fire Emergency ☎ 199, Emergency ☎ 112, Emergency rescue by helicopter ☎ 2124 4371, Emergency rescue by patrol boat ☎ 2123 8797.

**FAMILY TRAVEL** All heritage sites consider children to be aged 6-11.

**GAY AND LESBIAN TRAVELLERS** Homosexuality is legal in Malta, with the legal age of consent for both men and women being 16. However, Malta is a strict Catholic country and so a conservative attitude towards sex generally prevails. For more information see www.gaymalta.com and www.maltagayrights.org.

**HOSPITALS** Malta: Mater Dei Hospital, B'Kara Bypass, B'Kara (☎ 2545 000, www.materdeihospital.org.mt). Gozo: Gozo General Hospital, Victoria (☎ 2156 1600). There are also a number of health centres in main towns throughout the island where you can see a doctor. Check with

## Diving Emergencies

**St Luke's Hospital on Malta (see p 70) has a decompression** chamber. For any diving incidents requiring medical attention, emergency staff at the hospital can be contacted on ☎ 2123 4765 or ☎ 2123 4766 or by dialling the emergency telephone number ☎ 196.

your hotel reception, tourist information or telephone directory for details of one closest to where you are staying.

**INSURANCE** Always travel with adequate insurance cover. If you plan to undertake high risk activities such as diving, make sure your policy covers these activities. EU citizens should travel with a European Health Insurance Card, which entitles you to free or reduced state medical treatment if you should need care while in Malta.

**INTERNET ACCESS/CAFÉS** There is a good supply on internet cafés in the main tourist areas on Malta, but Gozo is less well supplied. Most hotels have computers for guest use; you pay for time online. Free WiFi is available at an increasing number of hotels, but only a few cafés. In some places you will need to purchase a Go Mobile card to access WiF. Cards cost 15€ for four hours to be used over 3 days or 30€ for 600 minutes to be used over 7 days.

**LOST PROPERTY** Contact the police headquarters in Floriana (☎ 2294 2667) or you can register missing items online at http://police.gov.mt.

**MAIL & POSTAGE** Malta's main post office is on Pjazza Kastilja opposite the Auberge de Castile in Valletta and is open 8.15am–3.45pm Mon–Fri and 8.15am–12.30pm Sat. Gozo's main post office is on Triq ir-Repubblika and is open 8.15am–4.30pm Mon–Fri and 8.15am–12.30pm Sat. Smaller branches can be found in most towns.

**MONEY & EXCHANGE BUREAUX** Malta's currency is the euro. One euro is divided into 100 cents. Notes in circulation come in 5€, 10€, 20€, 50€, 100€, 200€ and 500€ denominations, and there are 0.01€, 0.02€, 0.05€, 0.10€, 0.20€, 0.50€, 1€ and 2€ coins. The exchange bureaux at Malta International Airport is open 24 hours a day. In line with EU legislation on controls of cash entering or leaving the Community, any person entering or leaving Malta carrying cash or other monetary value of which is equal to or in excess of 10,000€ or equivalent is obliged to fill in the appropriate declaration form available from Customs.

**PARKING** Car parking rates vary throughout Malta. If you park in an open space that is looked after by a parker, it is customary to tip the parker at least 0.70€. Parking is difficult in busy areas such as Sliema and St Julian's and it is not advisable into take a car into Valletta.

**PHARMACIES** Pharmacies, or chemists as they are often called, are found throughout Malta and are open during normal shopping hours. On Sundays chemists open on a roster 7.30am–11.00am. Check the local Saturday and Sunday papers for details.

**POLICE** See emergency assistance.

**SAFETY** Malta is a relatively crime free country, however, visitors should take the usual precautions with valuables and personal safety.

**SENIOR TRAVELLERS** Malta is a popular destination for older visitors and anyone over 60 is entitled to discounts at many attractions and museums.

**SHOPPING** Details on shopping can be found throughout this book. Below are details on the larger open air markets where stalls are generally open from 8am–12.30pm.

### Malta

Valletta, Triq il-Merkanti—Mon–Sat and St James Ditch near the bus terminus—Sun.

Vittoriosa, St Margherita Heights—Tues.

Mosta, Triq il-Kostituzzjoni—Mon.

Birkirkara, in the vicinity of St Helen Basilica—Wed and Fri.

Rabat, opposite St Paul Parish Church—Sun.

Marsaxlokk waterfront—Sun.

### Gozo

Victoria, It-Tokk—Mon–Sat.

**SMOKING** Smoking is not allowed in any bar, restaurant or entertainment establishment unless there is a smoking designated area.

**STAYING HEALTHY** Standards of health and hygiene are high in Malta and the main precautions visitors should take are against the sun and heat. Always avoid over-exposure to the sun, even in winter. Wear a suitable factor sunscreen, not just for sunbathing but also when out walking or playing water sports. A sun hat is advisable and remember that children, and especially babies, need extra protection. If sunbathing, be warned that the strongest sunlight is 11am–3pm in peak summer months so avoid lying in the sun at this time if you can. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are sometimes a result of over-exposure. Heat stroke is the more serious of the two and requires medical attention. To avoid heat exhaustion drink plenty of water to replace lost fluids, and travel with salt replacement powders. Rehydration treatment is also essential if you suffer from an upset stomach and diarrhoea—another common health concern for visitors to hot countries. The other main health problem in Malta is insect bites. Bring a mosquito repellent and look out for wasps and sand flies. If you have an allergic reaction to bites from any of these insects, travel with an appropriate treatment or seek medical attention. For full information on International Travel and Health, check the World health Organisation's website at www.who.int/ith/en/.

**TELEPHONES** Public phones are located all around Malta, and most are card operated. Cards can be bought at numerous shops and post offices.

**TIME** Malta is on Central European Time, which is one hour ahead of GMT in winter and two hours ahead between the last Sunday in March and the last Sunday in October. Malta is six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time in winter and seven hours ahead between the last Sunday in March and the last Sunday in October. For a time check ☎ 195.

**TIPPING** As with most European countries, gratuities in Malta should be in the region of 10–15%.

**TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES** Malta: Malta International Airport, Arrivals Lounge, ☎ 2369 6073. Open daily 10am–9pm. 1 City Arcades, City Gate, Valletta, ☎ 2123 7747. Open Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun and public holidays 9am–1pm. Palazzo Spinola, St Julian's, ☎ 2138 1392. Open Mon–Fri 8am–12.30pm and 1.15pm–5pm.

Gozo: Tiġrija Palazz, level 1, Triq Repubblika, Victoria, ☎ 2156 1419. Open Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun and public holidays 9am–1pm.

**TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES** If you have a disability or any specific needs, contact the National Commission Persons with Disability—a Maltese government organisation dedicated to improving the quality of life for disabled persons—before you travel (☎ 2148 7789, text telephone ☎ 21446536, email helpdesk@knpd.org). Also see this organisation's website for plenty of useful information (www.knpd.org). If you require any assistance at Malta's airport, notify your airline before you fly as they will inform the airport directly.

**USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS** **Directory Enquires** ☎ 1182, **Yellow Pages helpline** ☎ 8007 2237, **Overseas Operator** ☎ 1152

**VAT** Accommodation 5%, otherwise 18%. Food, medicines, education, exports, maritime services, air, sea and public transport are all exempt.

**WATER** Tap water is generally safe to drink. However, some hotels in built up regions suggest that you don't drink their tap water. A wide range of local and imported still and sparkling bottled waters are available throughout the islands. Buying in bulk will save a considerable amount of money.

# A Brief History of Malta

## Pre History Malta

**5200–4100 BC** The first known human settlers arrive from Sicily. This era is known as the Ghar Dalam phase and is characterised by subsistence farming.

**3600–2500 BC** Megalithic temples constructed, which sometime after 2500 BC are abandoned.

**2300–800 BC** Bronze Age settlements. These new inhabitants cremate their dead and later defensive settlements indicate possible conflicts at this time.

## Classical Malta

**800–480 BC** Phoenician colonisation, which could have come about by this culture using the island as a base from which to trade rather than conquest. This era is influenced by the Greeks between 700–600 BC.

**480–218 BC** Carthaginian rule. Carthage is a Phoenician colony in North Africa and a smattering of temples are built during this era.

**218 BC** Following the Second Punic War with Rome, Malta becomes a Roman colony, although Carthaginian influence is still evident.

**60 AD** St Paul is shipwrecked on Malta and during his three month stay on the island he converts Publius, the island's governor to Christianity.

**395–870 AD** Following the division of the Roman Empire, Malta falls under Byzantine rule. It is believed that from around 450–500 AD the Goths and Vandals from North Africa occupy the islands and that Byzantine rule is re-established in 533 AD.

**870–1090 AD** The Arab empire invades and expels the Byzantine. Malta becomes a Muslim country.

## Medieval Malta

**1091–1194** Norman rule is introduced after the conquest by Count Roger from Sicily.

**1194–1265** Swabian rule. During this period Arabs are expelled from Malta and Sicily.

**1265–1282** Angevin rule, which is highly unpopular as the islanders are heavily taxed and downtrodden.

**1282** An uprising against Angevin rule, known as Sicilian Vespers. The Angevin are replaced by the Aragonese.

**1283–1479** Aragonese rule, which incorporates a brief period of feudal rule and the creation of Maltese nobility.

**1479–1530** The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castille draws Malta into the new

Spanish empire.The Knights of St John

**1530** Malta is granted to the Knights of St John following their expulsion from Rhodes (see boxed text on p 170). The Knights have to pay an annual rent of two falcons for the island—one to Emperor Charles V and one to the viceroy of Sicily.

**1531** Dragut Reis, a Turkish Corsair invades Gozo and carries off most of the islanders into slavery.

**1559–1564** Following a disastrous attack on the Turkish fleet off the island of Djerba near Tunisia, during which the Knights lost a large number of their ships, Grand Master Valette oversees the fortification of Birgu (Vittoriosa) and Isla (Senglea), the Knights' stronghold on Malta. Fort St Elmo is also built at the tip of the Sciberras peninsula to defend the entrance to the Grand Harbour. These preparations are carried out in the knowledge that a Turkish attack on Malta is imminent.

**1565** The long expected Turkish attack comes in May and the Great Siege of Malta begins. The Knights, with considerable help from the local population, resist the invading Turks, who do manage to capture Fort St Elmo. Relief troops finally arrive from Sicily in September and slaughter many of the remaining, demoralised and exhausted Turkish force, bringing an end to the Great Siege.

**1566** The construction of the Knights' new city of Valletta begins. The city is named after Grand Master Valette—the hero of the Great Siege.

**1566–1798** Malta remains under the rule of the Knights, who build new fortifications, churches and palaces throughout the island. During this era the Jesuits are expelled from Malta, a great earthquake strikes the island in 1633 and in 1792 the possessions of the Knights of St John held in France are seized by the revolutionary French government.

## The French Occupation

**1798–1800** Napoleon invades Malta and the country is occupied by the French army who expel the Knights of St John. Following the confiscation of church property, the Maltese rebel against the French who retreat to Valletta.

**1800** The French surrender to the British who agree to protect the islands.

## British Rule

**1800–1815** Following various European treaties and the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Malta becomes a British Crown Colony.

**1815–1914** A number of different forms of government come and go, each sharing power in various ways between the Maltese and the British.

**1914–1918** During WWI Malta becomes known as the 'Nurse of the Mediterranean' because it provides care for thousands of wounded soldiers from nearby campaigns such as Gallipoli in Turkey.

**1940–1943** Malta comes under constant bombing from Italian and German forces due to the country's strategic importance for Allied forces. In 1942 the country is subjected to 154 consecutive days of bombing which kills thousands and damages

large parts of the country. King George VI awards the whole island the George Cross in recognition of the islanders' bravery.

**1945** Prior to the Yalta Conference with Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt meet in Malta.

**1947–1964** Self government restored to Malta and, amid strikes and social unrest, conferences are held to discuss the future of the island.

### Independent Malta

**1964** Malta granted independence. The country becomes a sovereign nation within the British Commonwealth.

**1974** Malta becomes a republic.

**1979** British forces leave Malta.

**1990** Pope John Paul II visits Malta.

**2004** Malta joins the European Union.

**2008** The euro becomes the official currency on Malta.

# Empires that have **Ruled Malta**

### Phoenician Empire

Centred around ancient Canaan in what is now the Lebanon, this civilisation's power was based largely on its maritime trading. Little is known of the rise of the Phoenicians and much of our early knowledge comes from accounts of their defeats and victories in wars with the Amorites, Hittites and Egyptians between 1500 and 1200 BC. The Empire came to an end with defeat to the Persians led by Cyrus the Great in 539 BC, and their homeland was finally conquered in 332 BC by Alexander the Great.

### Carthaginian Empire

Located on the eastern side of Lake Tunis, legendarily founded by the Phoenicians and now a suburb of the Tunisian capital Tunis, Carthage was the centre of a great empire until its destruction in the Third Punic War (146 BC). From about 575 BC, Carthage established an empire that included the northern coast of Africa, parts of Spain, Sicily and Malta.

### Byzantine Empire

As the influence of Rome diminished, the continuum of Roman Emperors continued in the new capital of Constantinople. Also known as the Eastern Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire continued until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 15th century, but had been in slow decline from the 12th century.

### Normans

French based descendants of Viking conquerors, the Normans established kingdoms dotted around coastal Europe, including England and significantly Sicily. Roger II, the third king in the succession, unified the Norman conquests into one kingdom, which included the Maltese islands.

### Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire was an alliance of Germanic kingdoms that dominated much of Europe during the middle ages right up the 19th century when the final Holy Roman Emperor, Francis II, abdicated during the Napoleonic Wars. The alliance can trace is origins the Charlemagne, but its first official emperor was Otto the Great who, in 962, unified the kingdom that Charlemagne had divided between his sons.

## The Knights of St John

**The Sovereign and Military Order of the Knights Hospitaller of** St John, also known simply as the Knights of St John, were founded in Jerusalem in 1080 to protect and provide care for sick pilgrims in the Holy Land. The Order consisted of European noblemen drawn to the cause of defending the Catholic faith and consisted of eight nations—Italy, France, Provence, Auvergne, Castile, Aragon, Germany and England. However, langues, meaning languages, was used as a replacement term for nation as a means of avoiding patriotic conflicts.

After the First Crusade the Order assumed both religious and military responsibilities under the banner of caring for the sick and defending the Holy Land from infidels. However, following the recapture of the Holy Land by Islam in 1291, the Knights were forced to leave—eventfully relocating to Rhodes where they remained for around 200 years, building up a large sea faring force. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent expelled the Knights from Rhodes following their defeat in the Siege of Rhodes in 1522 and they eventually settled on Malta, only to be made homeless once again when Napoleon evicted them in 1798. The Order then moved from Russia to Rome, where they returned to their charitable roots and today provide humanitarian aid throughout the world.

### Swabian Dynasty

From 1138 to 1254, this Germanic dynasty, known as the house of Hohenstaufen, ruled the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick I—or Barbarossa—was chosen to lead the Germanic kingdoms and spread his power through Italy. When the final descendant of the Norman kingdom in Sicily—Constance—married Henry VI, the kingdom, including Malta, was passed to the Swabians.

### Angevin

A rival to the Holy Roman Empire, the Angevin dynasties were powerful families based in the French province of Anjou. The First Angevin Dynasty, known as the Plantagenets, ruled England between 1128–1485. The Second Angevin Dynasty, established in 1246, was granted the Kingdom of Sicily by the Papacy after the Angevins supported the Papacy in its conflict with the Swabians.

### Aragonese Empire

The Spanish empire of Aragon and the Angevins were in conflict over the Kingdoms of Sicily and Naples. After insurrection, invasion and division and marriage, the kingdom was reunited under the Aragonese in the late 15th century. Charles I of Aragon handed Malta and Gozo to the Knights Hospitaller in 1530 to protect Rome from the Ottoman Empire.

# Maltese **Language**

**The official languages in Malta are Maltese and English. Almost** everyone speaks both of these languages and many residents are also fluent in Italian. Maltese (or Malti) is a Semitic language believed to have descended from Siculo-Arabic. The Sicilian Kingdom, which then included the Maltese islands, was conquered by Arabic speakers in the 9th century and the Islamic rulers made Arabic the official language. The amalgam language created during Arabic rule died out in Sicily, but survived in Malta. Since then it has been influenced by Sicilian, Italian, French and, more recently, English. Maltese is the only Semetic language written in Latin script because the written language was developed under Norman rule, after the Arabic empire had been expelled. Studies suggest that between 30 and 40 per cent of Maltese words have Arabic origins, in contrast to 20 per cent English.

### Pronunciation Guide

Four letters have distinct Maltese forms:

**ċ pronounced 'ch' as in 'check'**
**ġ pronounced as a soft 'j' sound as in 'George'**
**ħ pronounced as the 'h' in 'have'**
**Ħ pronounced as a soft 'z' as in 'zero'**

Most other letters are pronounced the same as in English with some exceptions:

**h is silent as in 'hour'**
**j is pronounced as 'y' as in 'yell'**
**q is a glottal stop**
**x is pronounced 'sh' as in 'shall'**
**z is pronounced 'ts' as in 'sits'**

Some combinations of letters have distinct sounds:

**ij is pronounced 'ai'**
**ej is pronounced 'ay'**
**għ is silent**

In addition, sometimes in Maltese if a word begins with 'm' followed by a consonant, the word is pronounced as though its starts with an 'i', for example Mdina is pronounced Imdina.

If you want to have a try at speaking in Maltese, here are some useful words and phrases.

# Useful Phrases

### Basic Vocabulary & Phrases

| ENGLISH | MALTESE | PRONUNCIATION |
|---|---|---|
| yes | iva | (l'va) |
| no | le | (le) |

| ENGLISH | MALTESE | PRONUNCIATION |
|---|---|---|
| please | jekk joghgbok | (yekk yo-dz'bok) |
| thank you | grazzi | (gratsi) |
| good morning | bongu | (bon-ju) |
| good night | Il-lejl it-tajjeb | (illeyl itayeb) |
| good-bye | sahha | (sah-ha) |
| pleased to meet you | ghandi pjacir | (a-ndi pyachi-r) |
| what's your name? | inti x'ismek? | (inti shyismek) |
| my name is... | jien jisimni... | (yi-n yisimni) |
| how are you? | kif inti? | (kiyf inti) |
| I'm fine, thank you | Tajjeb/tajba, grazzi | (tay-yeb/tay-ba gratsi) |
| excuse me | skuzi | (skoo-zi) |
| sorry | skuzani | (skoo-zani) |

## Getting Around

| ENGLISH | MALTESE | PRONUNICATION |
|---|---|---|
| Do you speak English? | Titkellem bl-Ingliz? | (titkellem bl-inglis) |
| I don't speak Maltese | Ma nikellimx bil-Malti | (ma nitkellimsh bil malti) |
| Where is...? | Fejn hu? | (feyn oo...?) |
| Where are...? | Fejn huma...? | (feyn oomu...?) |
| Where can I find...? | Fejn insib...? | (feyn insi-b) |
| How much is it? | Kemm hi? | (kemm) |
| When? | Meta? | (meta) |
| What? | X'hini? | (shin-ee) |
| When does it open/close? | X'ħin jiftaħ/jagħlaq? | (sh'hin y-tiftah/ta-la') |
| Why? | Ghaliex? | (ah-li-sh) |
| I don't understand | Ma nifhimx | (ma nifimsh) |
| Can you show me? | Tista' turini? | (tista turi-yni) |
| Can you tell me? | Tista' tghidli? | (tista turi-yni |
| Can you help me? | Tista' tghinni? | (tista teyni) |
| Do you have any vacancies? | Għandek kmamar liberi? | (a-ndek kmarar liberi) |
| When does the boat leave/arrive? | Meta tel laq/jasal il-vapur? | (meta tellaq/was'al) |
| When does the bus leave/arrive? | Meta tel laq/jasal il-karozza? | (meta tellaq/was'al il karotsa) |
| I'd like a ticket | Nixtieq biljett | (nishti bilyet) |
| I'd like to hire a car/bike | Nixtieq nikri karozza/bajsikil | (nishti nikri karotsa/ bay-sikil) |
| Street | triq | (treek) |
| harbour | marsa | (marsa) |
| square | misraħ/pjazza | (mis-rah/piatsa) |
| beach | plajja | (pla-ya) |
| city | belt | (belt) |
| cathedral | katidral | (kat-e-dral') |
| church | knisja | (knis'ya) |

## Necessities

| ENGLISH | MALTESE | PRONUNCIATION |
|---|---|---|
| embassy | ambaxxata | (ambasha'ta) |
| bank | bank | (bank) |
| pharmacy | ispiżerija | (ispizarya) |
| help! | ajjut! | (a-yut) |
| Call a doctor! | Sejjah tabib! | (sey-yah tabeeb) |
| Police! | Pulizija! | (pulitsya) |
| I'm lost | Intlift | (intlift) |
| ambulance | ambulanza | (ambulan'tsa) |
| hospital | sptar | (sp-tar) |
| post office | posta | (post'ta) |
| public telephone | telefon pubbliku | (telephon public-oo) |
| open | miftuħ | (miftu') |
| closed | magħluq | (ma-lug') |
| entrance | dħul | (thui) |
| exit | ħrug | (hruch) |
| toilet | tojlit | (toy'lit) |
| men | rġiel | (r-jeel) |
| women | nisa | (neesa) |

## Numbers

| ENGLISH | MALTESE | PRONUNCIATION |
|---|---|---|
| Zero | xejn | (sheyn) |
| One | wieħed | (wi-hed) |
| Two | tnejn | (t-neyn) |
| Three | tlieta | (tli-ta) |
| Four | erbgħa | (erba) |
| Five | ħamsa | (hamsa) |
| Six | sitta | (sitta) |
| Seven | sebgħa | (seba) |
| Eight | tmienja | (tmi-nya) |
| Nine | disgħa | (disa) |
| Ten | għaxra | (a-shra) |
| Twenty | għoxrin | (o-shrin) |
| Forty | erbgħin | (erbeyn) |
| Fifty | ħamsin | (hamsin) |
| One hundred | mija | (miya) |
| One thousand | elf | (elf) |

## The Calendar

| ENGLISH | MALTESE | PRONUNCIATION |
|---|---|---|
| Sunday | il-ħadd | (il-hatt') |
| Monday | it-tnejn | (it-neyn) |
| Tuesday | it-tileta | (it-tlea'ta) |
| Wednesday | l-erbgħa | (l-er'ba) |
| Thursday | il-ħamis | (il-hamis') |
| Friday | il-gimgħa | (dzi'ma) |
| Saturday | is-sibt | (sipt) |

# Maltese Cuisine

**Cuisine in Malta is a blend of traditional Maltese, Italian** and other continental influences. Food is often rustic and based on seasonal produce and fish is eaten widely throughout the islands, as is rabbit (fenek), which is often fried with garlic or cooked in a stew. Listed below are some Maltese snacks and dishes.

## Breads and Savoury Snacks

Hobz (hops)—fresh baked crusty Maltese bread
Hobza (hopza)—a loaf of hobz
Hobz biz-zejt (hops biz zeyt)—bread with oil
Hobz bizet (hops bizset)—a snack consisting of a roll filled with tuna, olives, tomato, lettuce and onion
Ftaira (ft-ira)—round flat bread, often filled with tuna, tomatoes and olives.
Pastizzi (pastizee)—a small savoury puff pastry filled with either ricotta cheese or peas
Bombette (bombette)—spinach, mozzarella and ham in a breadcrumb dome
Qassata ('assata)—ricotta pie filled with spinach and anchovy
Arancini (aranchini)—spinach or ham and pea in a breadcrumb ball
Gbejniet (jbeyniet)—sheep or goats cheese

## Soups

Minestra (min-estra)—a thick vegetable stew
Aljotta (alyotta)—fish soup
Kusksu (kusk-su)—broad bean soup with pasta

## Maltese Bread

Hobz, Malta's traditional bread, is subsidised by the government to keep the price low and protect local bakeries. Hobza (a loaf of bread) can be bought for as little as 0.20€ and can be found in small bakeries and shops everywhere. Since Malta joined the European Union, the organisation's anti-subsidy rules have jeopardised these protective measures. The fact that the subsidy is a major election issue and that some Maltese would consider leaving the EU rather than lose the subsidy is indicative of the importance of hobz to Maltese nationalism.

## Main Courses & Fish

Bragioli (brajiola)—a mix of meat, bacon, eggs, onions and bread-crumbs, wrapped in thin slices of steak
Ross il-Forn (ross il-forn)—savoury rice dish baked with meat and tomato sauce
Kapunta (ka-punta)—Maltese ratatouille with tomatoes, aubergine (eggplant), capers and green peppers
Stuffat tal-fenek (stuffat tal fenek)—rabbit stew
Stuffat tal-Qarnit (stuffat tal-'amit)—octopus stew
Pixxispad (phishispad)—swordfish

Spinotta (spinotta)—bass
Cerna (serna)—grouper
Trill (trill)—red mullet
Acciola (asiola)—amberjack

## Desserts & Cakes

Puddina (pud-ina)—Maltese bread pudding
Kannoli (can-oli)—Flaky pastry filled with sweet ricotta and candid fruit
Kwareziml (quaresimi)—hazelnut crumble with spices, honey and almonds
Qagħaq tal-għasel (ʼa-ayʼ tal aysel)—honey or treacle rings
Imqaret (imʼaret)—deep fried date filled pastries
Biskuttini tal-lewz (biscitinin tal looz)—almond macaroons

## Additional Foods

Żebbuġ Mimli (zebbuʼdz mimli)—olives stuffed with anchovies, caper and breadcrumbs
Bigilla (bijilla)—a traditional bean paste made with broad beans mashed with garlic and parsley. Often served as a dip
Fritturi Tal-Makku (frit-uri-tal makku)—deep fried whitebait in batter
Fritturi Tal-Qaqaċċ (frit-uri tal qaqochʼcha)—deep fried artichoke hearts in garlic and batter
Bebbus (bebhuʼsh)—snails simmered in wine and herbs
Raqvjul (ravʼiol)—Maltese ravioli, stuffed with ricotta, spinach or minced meat. In Gozo, these are usually stuffed with Ġbejniet
Timpana (timpanya)—macaroni baked with a pastry crust, often with hard boiled eggs
Għaġin bi-inċova (aajin bi inchova)—crisply fried spaghetti with tomato paste, anchovies and garlic
Xalzett tal-Malti (shalzet tal malti)—Maltese sausage made of pork, peppercorns, coriander, parsley and salt. Sometimes made with garlic
Klamarii (clamari)—calamari or squid
Bragjoli tat-tonn (brajioli tat ton)—Tuna strips rolled around bread crumbs, capers, olives, anchovies, chopped hard boiled egg and herbs. Glazed in vinegar

## Drinks

Kinnie (kinny)—a non-alcoholic soft drink flavoured with bitter oranges and aromatic herbs
Cisk (chisk)—local lager
Hop Leaf—local pale ale
Blue Label—local smooth cream ale
Many different local wines are available throughout the islands.

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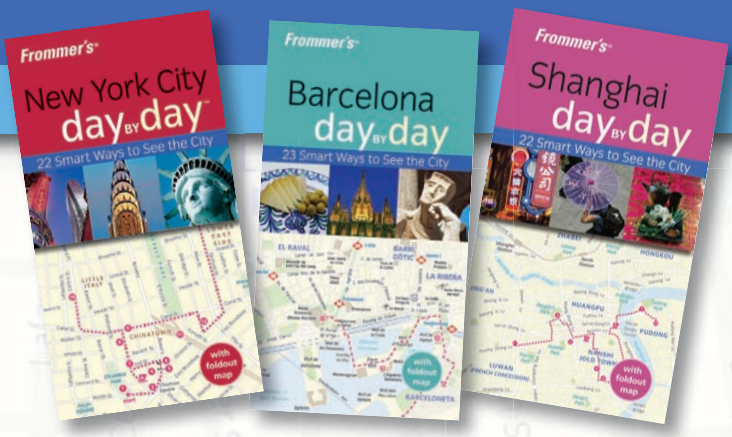


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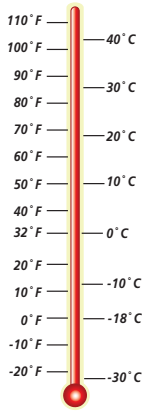
## CLOTHING SIZES

| WOMEN | | | MEN | | | CHILDREN | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| UK | US | Europe | UK Metric (cm) | US | Europe | UK Metric (Ht cm) | US |
| 8 | 6 | 36 | 91 | 36 | 46 | 109 | 4 |
| 10 | 8 | 38 | 97 | 38 | 48 | 122 | 6 |
| 12 | 10 | 40 | 102 | 40 | 50 | 140 | 8 |
| 14 | 12 | 42 | 107 | 42 | 52 | 147 | 10 |
| 16 | 14 | 44 | 112 | 44 | 54 | 152 | 12 |
| 18 | 16 | 46 | | | | 157 | 14 |
| 20 | 18 | 48 | | | | | |

## METRIC CONVERSIONS

### TEMPERATURE




***To convert F to C:***
*subtract 32 and multiply by 5/9 (.555)*
***To convert C to F:***
*multiply by 1.8 and add 32*

***32˚F = 0˚C***

### DISTANCE

| *To convert* | *multiply by* |
|---|---|
| inches to centimeters | 2.54 |
| centimeters to inches | .39 |
| feet to meters | .30 |
| meters to feet | 3.28 |
| yards to meters | .91 |
| meters to yards | 1.09 |
| miles to kilometers | 1.61 |
| kilometers to miles | .62 |

***1 ft = .30 m*** ***1 mile = 1.6 km***
***1 m = 3.3 ft*** ***1 km = .62 mile***

### WEIGHT

| *To convert* | *multiply by* |
|---|---|
| Ounces to grams | 28.35 |
| Grams to ounces | .035 |
| Pounds to kilograms | .45 |
| Kilograms to pounds | 2.20 |

***1 ounce = 28 grams***
***1 pound = .4555 kilogram***

***1 gram = .04 ounce***
***1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds***

### LIQUID VOLUME

| *To convert* | *multiply by* |
|---|---|
| Gallons to liters | 4.55 |
| Liters to gallons | .22 |
| Pints to liters | .56 |
| Liters to pints | 1.76 |

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ISBN 978-0-470-71553-6
51299
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UK £8.99 US $12.99 CAN $13.99

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